While breathing our eternal desire for a humane homecoming on inhumane territory, it (the margin) is as undefined as we are. In our attempt to structure the chaos that space initially is, the margins have become the last reminders that can possibly tell us who we are. They are inhabited by the other and inhabit the opposites from which our phoney worlds are put together. The margins are ugly and beautiful. They laugh and they cry. They are full of energy and still remain calm. They are without sound while they speak. They stabilise, and still, exist through instability. They catch our dreams, and still, they are sleeping themselves. They give birth and they kill at the same time. The margins are us. - Cuper and Miessen, ‘Spaces of Uncertainty’ 2002

These are interesting times in the state of Ohio. In many of our cities there is a debate about land use. Consecutive recessions and the decline of industry have lead to an unprecedented number of abandoned and vacant lots, which contribute to blight and crime in the region’s neighborhoods. The abdication of responsibility for urban design to private developers from the hands of policymakers, planners and architects has contributed to the inner cities decline. There is currently a confluence of need and opportunity that presents artists with an opportunity to step outside of their normative roles and demonstrate new possibilities in urban environments.

In ‘Relational Aesthetics’ (1998), Nicolas Bourriaud posits art ‘as social interstice’ and draws upon the long history of artists who have used leftover spaces as art ‘materials’ in order to designate ‘the entire sphere of human interaction as a legitimate subject for art’. Doina Petrescu, in ‘Architecture and Participation’, advocates a series of explorative and community driven ‘spatial interventions’ with the architect negated as author/master and instead taking up the role of a facilitator of a communities desires; since at the beginning all those outside of the power structure have is ‘desire without power’. Petrescu emphasizes the importance of the temporary and successive nature of these interventions, in order to prevent the crystallization of power and homogeneity of thinking, maintaining the space as constantly ‘becoming’. In this way, Petrescu views these marginal spaces as dynamic catalysts of a community’s own self realization, through urban actions.

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1 Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream, p153-182, Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck
2 Relational Aesthetics, Nicholas Bourriaud, 1998
3 Propaganda in the Garden, Cathy Lebowitz, Art in America, October 2009
4 Architecture and Participation, p43-63 Doina Petrescu, Peter Blundell Jones, Jeremy Till
5 Architecture and Participation, p43-63 Doina Petrescu, Peter Blundell Jones, Jeremy Till
This reclamation and reinvention of public space is a recurrent theme for individuals working at the intersection of architecture, art and planning. Fritz Haeg argues that at a time when our ‘towns and cities are engineered for isolation....growing food becomes a way to subvert this tendency....If we want to reintroduce a vital public realm into our communities’. Haeg works with suburban families to replace their resource draining, fertilizer drinking front lawns with highly productive fruit and vegetable gardens, positing gardening as a political act and a provocative grassroots action.

Nils Norman is a London based artist who creates provocative and playful design proposals for land use, offering us a critique on the way that public space is rendered dead and inhospitable by commercial development interests. His work is propagandistic, yet playful, subverting the language of planners by using drawings and models - in order to suggest alternative urban spaces and experiences.

‘Spaces of Uncertainty’ - architects Cuper and Miessen’s publication of 2002, toed the line between the visual arts and architectural practice in the form of a photographic documentation of informal trade, urban agriculture and leisure activities taking place in the leftover spaces of Berlin, as a way to ‘address the micro politics of public space’. This work functions as research into ways to redress the power balance between the architect and the community they are serving.

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6 Edible estates: Attack on the front lawn, p25-45, Fritz Haeg

7 www.archinect.com Interview with Nils Norman, September 2007
Until 2002 Norman’s work remained theoretical, but this changed with a commission for an 80 meter bridge in the new town of Roskilde, Denmark. He has come full circle; the artist riling against the stuffiness of urban planning culture and dogma is having his ideas taken seriously and put into practice by the planning community.

However, many of the most interesting projects of recent years have taken place in European cities. I would like to conduct this research and project from a standpoint firmly rooted in the context of Midwestern cities. Midwestern cities have a particular set of characteristics and needs: unlike European cities that are often dense and must make use of vertical space, Midwestern cities do not lack space, in fact there is a surplus of space in many of our inner cities. There is an ongoing movement and debate to identify the best uses for this land. The Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative (Kent State) has carried out several pop up projects in recent years, mainly taking the form of musical events and forums, in abandoned spaces in the city.

The Bridge Project, 2009, Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative. The lower level of the Detroit-Superior Bridge was opened up for a 2 day showcase of local artists and forums.

‘The Heidelberg Project’, Tyree Guyton, Detroit. 1986-

However, the Bridge Project lacks the subversive energy of a Nils Norman proposal, or the furious place making and storytelling of Tyree Guyton’s Heidelberg Project. In the current struggle to redefine cities like Detroit, Wendy S. Walters argues that Guyton’s work is “an act of initial authorship, or the creation of identity” because of the vivid and celebratory way in which the project “dramatizes a community’s resurrection”.

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8 Wendy S. Walters, ‘Turning the Neighborhood Inside Out: Imagining a New Detroit in Tyree Guyton’s Heidelberg project’ TDR 2001
The CUDC advocates the idea of planned shrinkage as an alternative to the quest for continued growth\(^9\). That is, taking the decline as an opportunity to reinvent the city and its civic life through its marginal and overlooked spaces. I visualize this project as a playful investigation into ways to utilize such spaces, within this context, and with an emphasis on issues such as urban agriculture, play in the urban environment, storm water management & pedestrianism. Over the course of the semester, I will complete the design work and research for several ‘spatial interventions’ in identified sites. I will identify the particular characteristics of each site, and work to develop a fitting response. Photography will be used to document and research.

EXAMPLES:

\[\text{PROJECT PROPOSAL #2} \quad \text{NEGATIVE SPACE}\]

\[\text{NEGATIVE SPACE}\]

\[\text{A rigid but biodegradable sculptural structure that supports plant life.}\]
This structure should
- Comprise a versatile system with many plant-growing applications.
- Have an appearance and structure informed by plant structures.
- Be biodegradable but rigid. The structure has a life cycle: it lives as long as the plants and degrades/disappears at the end of growing season.
- Co-opt an existing structure (eg. chain link fence) and subvert it, thus transforming an abandoned space.

\[\text{Guerrilla Plantings}\]
Plantings of native plants in sites such as Easton Mall in Columbus; as an act of protest against places that are completely antithetical to nature and a sustainable way of life.

\(^9\) Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative, Re Imagining a More Sustainable Cleveland.
Re-purposed signs
Vacant signs re purposed, guerilla style, to denote possibilities for the vacant space that they now mark out, provoking speculation and questions as to what is actually happening in the space. The words are intended to hang in the air as a challenge to passersby.

Urban Prairie
Accelerating the process by which nature is taking back the land in certain abandoned areas of the city by researching and planting species that are native to Ohio.
Garden

Work with members of a residents of a local homeless camp to plan and create a vegetable garden.
- How is the space already used/organized by inhabitants?
- How can a garden be inserted effectively?
- How are found materials and the existing resources local to the camp already put to use?
- Camp members may be able to sell their produce to other members of the community

Joined up passageway

Connecting vacant properties to create a safe walkway connecting areas of a neighborhood to public transport- bus stops, providing a pleasant place to walk and encouraging pedestrianism, healthy lifestyle choices etc.

SPECIFICS:

- This will be a collaborative project with Marci Lininger, graduate student in the Environmental Sciences and Natural Resources program at OSU. Marci comes from an Art and Science background, and I anticipate going to her for practical and logistical advice.
- We also anticipate seeking potential collaboration/consultation with: Community groups, elementary schools, ODOT, homeless leaders, Local Matters etc.
- Photography will be an important element in this project, as a tool to document the research that is done.
TIME LINE

Jan 18th - March (approx 5 weeks)
Initial research + development process:
- identify sites, photograph & document, consider individual characteristics
- identify stakeholders; make contact and consult
- develop responses for sites
- source materials
- Growing season for Zone 5 begins April 15 for outside planting.
  (cool crops a little earlier) Plant transplant crops indoors mid February.

March 1 - May 10th
carrying out of **one or more** selected spatial interventions as experimental pilots

MATERIALS & RESOURCES (potential)

Lumber
wood fiber/paper pulp (cellulose) - from recycled materials.
seeds
felt
digital camera (still and video)
other people
inkjet paper
gardening tools
soil
clay, or plaster (possibly for mold making)
gardening uniforms
oven
Paint
monitors
ladder

BUDGET

Here is a budget for each of the proposed spatial interventions listed above. These should be reviewed at the time when the selected pilot intervention is defined. Since there is a lot of research to be done, these should be viewed as examples rather than definitive.

**Biodegradable Plant Structure:**
wood fiber/paper pulp- recycled materials ($0- donations)
seeds- $80-$100
clay (for possible mold making) - $1-$1.50 per lb @ estimated 25lbs = $25- $37.50
OR plaster @ $8.99 for 25lbs
TOTAL = $88.99 - $137.50

Guerilla Plantings/Urban Prairie
Plants (from seeds)- $30-50
Groundsmen Uniforms- $20
TOTAL = $50-$70

Repurposed Signs
Spray Paint- $40-$60

Homeless Camp Garden
Lumber- 2x4x10 @ $3.71 (6) =$22.26
Tools-$50
Seeds/Plants-$30- $50
Tiller- rent from $30 per day
TOTAL = $102.26 - $152.26

Joined up Passageway
Plants/landscaping- $250-$300
Tiller -rent from $30 per day
TOTAL- $580

Documentation
Inkjet paper: up to $200

OUTCOMES:

I envision this project as the research and development process for my Master’s Thesis. In judging whether the project is successful, the following criteria may be used:

- Has valuable research into current land use issues occurred?
- Has there been an effort to reach out to stakeholders? (community groups, area churches etc)
- Has there been communication with other local groups working on similar issues?
- Has there been a genuine investigation into different vacant spaces and the possible interventions that could be made?
- Are the proposed interventions responsive to the corresponding site?
- Has there been research done about and awareness of the potential legal and health issues surrounding the use of abandoned land? (for example soil contamination, eminent domain) In order to make informed choices and risks.
- Has there been experimentation?
- Is there a pilot project in process?
- Is there appropriate documentation in the form of photographs, writing, possibly video, of the research that has been done?
One intervention may require a great deal of research and collaboration/community input and incremental in nature, for example the proposed community garden for the homeless camp. Another may be defined as a ‘hit and run’ guerilla project with an emphasis on provocation.

There should be a mixture of experimental projects, with an emphasis on real world action, and projects based on careful research. The final presentation of this project in May will take the form of photographic and other documentation, research and writing.