

RETHINKING WASTE

- A study of the **CONCEPT** and **HANDLING** of **WASTE**
and **WASTESPACES** through the case of **PRUITT-IGOE**

åsa berggren 2013

Master's Thesis
Architecture and Urban Design, U+A/DL
Chalmers University of Technology
Göteborg, Sweden 2013

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ÅSA BERGGREN

Department of Architecture
CHALMERS UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
Göteborg, Sweden 2013

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Department of Architecture
Chalmers University of Technology
SE-412 96 Göteborg
Sweden
Telephone +46 (0)31 772 1000

Cover: The Pruitt-Igoe Forest, April 2013
Photo by author

ISBN 978-91-637-3287-4
Spectra D'Sign kopiering AB
Göteborg, Sweden 2013

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Department of Architecture
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SUMMARY

Words such as 'waste', 'rubbish', 'trash' and 'garbage' conjure up certain problematic images for most of us. These are words that imply separation, abandonment, loss, decline and, potentially, failure and death. Yet they are an inevitable part not only of consumerist society, but of life itself, and cannot be ignored. In all societies, throughout history, there have been, are, and will be waste things, waste people, wasted lives and wasted time.

However, nothing is *intrinsically* waste. Waste is the opposite of that which a society considers useful, clean, productive or desirable. Waste is defined by an order that is not absolute: though the existence of waste is constant, its definition differs from culture to culture, from time to time.

Waste in relation to space can take many forms. Wastespaces, urban wastelands, drossspaces, urban voids, terrains vagues or dead zones can be found all over the civilized world, be it in the shape of former industrial sites, wild greenspaces, ruins or vacant lots. These landscapes, often considered problematic eyesores, represent the forgotten, the abandoned, the thrown away - that which is considered wasted.

Can these inevitable waste landscapes, unwanted people and thrown away objects serve a valuable purpose in the otherwise increasingly homogenized and ordered city and in the lives of its citizens? Using the example of the growing wasteland left behind after the demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe project in St. Louis, Missouri, this thesis aims to explore the merits of waste and wastespaces, both symbolic and practical. Furthermore, it looks for possibilities and examples of how to retain these potential merits when redeveloping urban wastespaces, as well as incorporating the same values into the design of new public space.

Keywords: wasteland, Pruitt-Igoe, St. Louis, abandonment, waste

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“(Waste is) all the stuff of life and it is all evidence of death.”

- Andrew O’Hagan, The Things We Throw Away

Waste, as much as we may try to hide and deny it, is all around us, not least in the city. Big or small, left out or left behind, urban wastespaces are part of even the most tidy and organized of cities. They are spaces that are forgotten, abandoned, and overgrown; slivers of wilderness and ruin weaved into the urban fabric. Both threatening and fascinating, they silently remind us of the events that created them.

These landscapes, often considered problematic eyesores, are spots of chaos in the midst of the order of the city and have evolved rather than been designed. They can seem dangerous and successfully act as scenes for fictional horror stories as well as real-life illegal or destructive activity. But can these spaces - and the ruins, thrown away objects and alternative activity they are home to - teach us something?



“ Modern Architecture died in St. Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3.32pm (or thereabouts) when the infamous Pruitt Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final coup de grâce by dynamite.”

- Charles Jencks, 1977

In 1972, the first of the 33 slab blocks that made up the Pruitt-Igoe social housing project in St. Louis, Missouri was demolished. Today, 40 years later, the site remains untouched. A forest has grown in the place of the infamous housing project, and the houses in the areas surrounding it have gradually been abandoned.

The history of the Pruitt-Igoe project’s birth, short lifetime, decline, death and aftermath exemplifies the omnipresent cycle of a space acquiring and losing value. In addition, the site today - a large forest or wastespace in the middle of St. Louis - is a question waiting to be answered. Does it have any value, and how do we approach redesigning it?

The demolition of one of the Pruitt-Igoe buildings.
Image: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

I first encountered the images of the Pruitt-Igoe project and the forest grown after its demolition during my first year of the Architecture and Urban Design Master’s program (2011/2012), spent on Erasmus exchange at the École Supérieure d’Architecture de Belleville in Paris. There, I participated in a design studio named Pruitt-Igoe, L’urbain abandonné (abandoned urbanity), in which our assignment was to develop and submit a proposal for the Pruitt-Igoe Now competition. Although I did not have the chance to visit the site at that point, the idea and the myth of the Pruitt-Igoe project and the growing abandonment around its former site in St. Louis fascinated me. It seemed to me a poetic example of a problem existing in different scales all over the world; the abandonment of cities or parts of them, and in addition how a problematic past could make redevelopment of these sites even more difficult. At the same time, the power of the myth of Pruitt-Igoe and the interest and engagement it attracted, and is still attracting, from

all over the world and from people from all fields makes it a scene for setting an example; it gives the possibility to change a site with a notoriously problematic past to an iconic example for the future.

After I returned to Chalmers for my last Master’s year, still with all this on my mind, I had the chance to write an essay about Urban Wastelands in the course Advanced Theory & Methodology. This developed into continued research and finally this thesis work within the U+A/DL studio led by Ana Betancour.

By studying abandoned urban spaces in general, and the site of the former Pruitt-Igoe project in particular, this thesis seeks to better understand why wastespaces are considered problematic and to explore the possibility of turning these problems into merits. The aim is to find new viewpoints, not to 'move' these spaces from the 'waste' category to the realm of what is generally considered a valuable space. It is my thesis that if that which is forgotten, abandoned, left out or left behind by the majority (whether it be objects, spaces, activities or even people) is routinely considered waste and thrown away, less obvious values may be lost.

Can analyzing and understanding the hidden values and potential in these alternative and problematic things, spaces and activities result in more nuanced approaches towards both the redesign of existing wastespaces and the design of any public space in the city?

In order to delimit and frame my research, I have concentrated on the case of the site of the former Pruitt-Igoe project: its history, its present and its possible future. Many studies have been done on the Pruitt-Igoe project from a wide range of perspectives. My scope on the subject is limited: I am not personally connected to the site or the culture of the city, or the nation, of which it is a part. Nor do I claim to understand the intricacies of the racial and social politics of the US in the 1940's, 50's and 60's, which to a very large extent affected the inhabitants of Pruitt-Igoe and the project itself. In my thesis, Pruitt-Igoe is treated as an example, a representative, of something that exists in many other places: a site with a traumatic history and an uncertain future.

The references I use to exemplify the categories of design approaches are not exhaustive, nor necessarily representative of the range of examples that exist of projects using these approaches.

Instead, they are just a tiny amount of cases that I have judged to be helpful in describing one method or viewpoint used in the design of a project.

My research can be divided into three parts, more or less separated from each other. They are:

Reading literature such as Kevin Lynch's *Wasting Away* and Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger* and several other titles, as well as a number of books, historical documents and articles about the history of the Pruitt-Igoe project. This has laid the ground for my thesis.

Traveling and interviewing. Having the chance to travel to St. Louis and visit the former Pruitt-Igoe site and the surrounding community in person, I was able to conduct a number of interviews, laying the groundwork for a number of aspects of the consequent design proposal for the Pruitt-Igoe site. Apart from a deeper understanding of the North St. Louis community and the activities going on around the site, this also gave me a number of very interesting general examples of how to approach abandonment and vacant lots in the city.

Designing a schematic proposal for the Pruitt-Igoe site. This work, consisting of the development of drawings, mappings, models and methods has given me the chance to try out the strategies I have referenced and found to be interesting examples of how to approach wastespaces.



Shadow sculpture made from household trash objects, 2013. Photo and arrangement by author

“ *Where there is design, there is waste.*”

- Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*

Waste is a concept difficult to define precisely. Kevin Lynch, urban planner and the author of *Wasting Away*, describes waste as that which is

“ (...) *worthless or unused for human purpose. It is a lessening of something without useful result (...) it is the spent and used thing: garbage, thrash, litter, junk, impurity and dirt. There are waste things, waste lands, waste time and wasted lives.*”¹

Nothing, however, is *intrinsically* waste. Instead, dirt and waste are the products of a system of classifications.² Waste and dirt are the opposites of that which a social system classifies as pure, clean,

¹ Douglas, 1966

² Till, 2009 p.69

productive or useful. As the social system of classification changes, so does the definition of waste. In this way, something that is regarded as waste by our society can be considered useful by another. At the same time, what is generally considered waste by a society can still be of value to certain or all of that society’s members. For example: in a capitalist system, waste is something that lacks exchange value on the market. As Lynch points out, dereliction or abandonment in a capitalist system is always defined in relation to the market. “If it pays, it isn’t derelict. If it doesn’t pay, due to some human devilmint, and once did pay, then it is derelict.”³ At the same time, what lacks value in the market can still have user value. As an example, in America, many national parks, such as Yellowstone National Park, is situated where they are because the land where they lay was considered valueless for profitable lumbering, mining, grazing, or agriculture.⁴

³ Lynch, 1990 p.98

⁴ Runte, 1973 p.4-11

In social anthropologist Michael Thompson’s *Rubbish Theory*, the author suggests that in our culture, all objects can be divided into one of two categories: *transient* objects and *durable* objects. The former ‘decrease in value over time, and have finite life-spans’, while the latter ‘increase in value over time and have (ideally) infinite life-spans.’⁵ A third category, rubbish, dirt, or waste, is created when the transient object has decreased in value to the point of being worthless. Thompson argues that the transient object can move into the rubbish category, and an object from the rubbish category can turn into a durable object, but ‘no other transition is possible.’⁶ Which category an object falls into has not got to do with the intrinsic nature of the object, but is decided by the aforementioned social system of classification in which it exists. This classification of objects may not be fail-proof but it brings into light the fine line between an obsolete object that is

⁵ Thompson, 1979

⁶ Till, 2009 p. 71

considered rubbish and one that is considered valuable. This is particularly interesting in relation to architecture, where certain ruins of buildings are regarded as waste, whereas others are seen as highly valuable.

Waste, as architect and author Jeremy Till notes in *Architecture Depends*, is at its core a reminder of the ‘inevitability of time’. Waste is what the things that are new and shiny today will inevitably become tomorrow. It is loss, decline, separation and ultimately death. For that reason, especially in a time and culture where youth and newness are the ideal, waste and dirt are commonly feared, unwanted and hidden.



Waste is not objective. The 'Zabaleen' or Garbage people in Cairo live off collecting and recycling the city's garbage. Photo: Sam Tarling Opposite page: Bas Princen



RETHINKING WASTE
Jasa Berggren U+A/DL 2012/13

Although we know that waste and dirt are inevitable parts of life and society, our efforts to hide and repress their existence are many. By deciding what is impure and stepping away from it we are saved from that which is biologically unsafe, but we have also – perhaps more importantly – created a system of categorizations through which the world seems more understandable to us. Anthropologist Mary Douglas wrote: ‘Dirt is matter out of place’, suggesting that the label ‘dirt’ does not describe the nature of something, but instead implies an infringement on the boundaries of a social order.⁷ By separating ourselves from that which we consider dirty or useless we reaffirm our own opposing positions as pure and useful. Kevin Lynch adds to Douglas’ famous statement that ‘filth is dirt too close’, pointing to the difference between trash in our house and trash in the street, or trash on the table and trash on the floor.⁸ Further linking the notion of

⁷ Douglas, 2002

⁸ Lynch, 1990 p.14

waste and dirt to value and validity, Lynch also notes that the people whose occupation it is to get close to waste – garbage collectors, junk dealers or scavengers – are ‘never quite respectable’, and that these jobs are generally considered lower in status than for example farm work, even though the former requires more skill.⁹

Today, more often than not, waste seems to imply a threat, and it seems to be creeping closer. The trash that is the inevitable consequence of consumption grows in hidden and sometimes forgotten garbage dumps of unimaginable sizes. The blurred notion of sustainability is more and more frequently used, giving status and validity to the activities of reusing and recycling, but at the same time seemingly implying the intrinsic immorality in the acts of discarding and wasting. In parallel to this mind-set runs the spirit of consumerist society, constantly prompting us to throw away, forget and replace

⁹ Lynch, 1990 p.16

anything less than perfect or brand new. Addressing our problematic relationship to waste, novelist Andrew O’Hagan writes in his essay *The Things We Throw Away*:

“ The question of what it means to live a good life has become the occasion for personal accounts of what one does with one’s rubbish. This is the way we manage news on the subject, with a growing and often panicked sense of what our personal habits might say about our harmfulness. There are other pressing topics of course, but the environment - and the very local matter of rubbish - is the pamphleteering issue of our time. Yet none of us feels safe with it, none of us knows exactly what to think: intimate disquiet about waste is liable to spring a trap in our minds.”¹⁰

¹⁰ O’Hagan, 2007 p.4

In the beginning of *Wasting Away*, Kevin Lynch paints the picture of two different ‘Cacotopias’: The waste Cacotopia, where waste is out of control, and a wasteless Cacotopia, where waste is prevented at all costs. Unsurprisingly, both visions prove to be nightmarish. Our ‘intimate disquiet about waste’ cannot be calmed by the complete removal of trash or dirt, nor is it possible to entirely disregard the unpleasantness and possible dangers of that which we consider impure.

The label of waste is not applicable only to objects. Just as we dislike closeness to trash or garbage, there are people and activities that are regarded as unsafe and unwanted by society. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman writes:

*" 'It is criminals who make us insecure, and it is outsiders who cause crime' we are told, and so 'we must round up, incarcerate and deport the outsiders to restore our lost or stolen security.' "*¹¹

By pointing to the stranger, as in separating dirt from purity, we feel safer in our own position within the boundaries of the acceptable and legitimate. The fear of the stranger, and our need for classification and order, causes strong desires to bundle off certain groups to where they are considered to belong - and this somewhere is not in my country, not in my part of town, not in our public space.

¹¹ Bauman, 2002

As a small-scale but concrete example of this, in Tokyo, certain public benches are designed in a way that makes sleeping or lying down on them impossible, thus preventing the homeless population to spend the night in the city's parks.¹²

Just like dirt is matter out of place, the unwanted or waste activity is not one that is necessarily dangerous or criminal, but rather it is an activity carried out in the improper place. In an article about an intervention carried out by his creative group Transgressive Architecture, author and artist Gil Doron gives the examples of *"commercial activity on the sidewalk instead of a shop; sex in a park instead of at home; dancing in an abandoned warehouse instead of a regulated club (...)"* These are not practically harmful or destructive activities; their unacceptability lie in their breach of our social norms.

¹² Lockton, 2006 architectures.danlockton.co.uk



Equally, put into order, the unwanted object, activity or person is no longer waste. This explains why the dead body of a person – useless in any practical sense – is granted a physical and public space within the city: a space in a cemetery. At the same time, many still living members of society are considered (and even called) ‘trash’ and actively removed from our public spaces.

This brings us to the *wastespace*, a place made up by and containing all the aforementioned instances of waste: waste objects, waste people, waste activities and wasted time.

Suburban youths become outsiders in central Paris. Stills from Mathieu Kassovitz's La Haine, 1995. Canal +, Egg Pictures



Waste registered in relation to space can take many different forms: abandoned buildings, ruins, urban forests, vacant lots and brownfields. Urban wastespaces are not, unlike what Rem Koolhaas referred to as *Junkspace*, landscapes that were designed in an unsatisfactory or questionable manner; instead, they are “accidental” landscapes, oversights that were not planned or designed at all.

To denote this genre of abandoned spaces, architect, historian and philosopher Ignasi de Solà-Morales coined the term *terrain vague*, described as spaces

“internal to the city but external to its everyday use. In these apparently forgotten places, the memory of the past seems to predominate over the present.”¹³

He notes that even though these spaces are spaces of the possible, of freedom, they are, in their

¹³ Solà-Morales Rubió, 1995 p.120

unproductiveness, from an economic point of view places where ‘the city is no longer’. They are, like all waste, outside the system, the negative image of the city. They are defined by what they are not: they are unproductive, unsafe, unused, and therefore confuse and worry us.

In his book *Heterotopia and the city*, author Gil Doron calls these same areas *dead zones*, and puts them in relation to the category of spaces Michel Foucault called *heterotopias*. The heterotopia is an ambiguous and multifaceted concept referring to spaces, both physical and mental, of *otherness*. In Doron’s interpretation of the concept, heterotopias are institutionalized and publically recognized places that offer something other than the sphere of work and home (*oikos*) or action and politics (*agora*). Examples of heterotopias seen through Doron’s eyes are museums, playgrounds, stadiums, hospitals and prisons. In *Heterotopia and the city*, Doron defines dead zones as the residue, not the equivalent, of

heterotopias. Where the heterotopia is exclusionary and institutionalized, '(...) the dead zone is always open, although entering there can be 'at your own risk.'¹⁴ In the dead zone, there is a lack of both expectations and surveillance, which lays the ground for both freedom and danger.

A more concrete aspect of urban wastespace is the vegetation, or wilderness, that often forms a big part of it. While the Pruitt-Igoe wasteland, for example, consists partly of ruins and debris, its main characteristics are decided by the forest it has become. In the essay *A Call to Arms*, environmentalist Marion Shoard describes a kind of urban wastespace she calls *Wildscape*. Wildscapes, she explains, are different from greenspaces, which can be any park, football field, or planned green area in the city. She writes:

"In the heart of Dorking, where I live, lies the

¹⁴ Doron, 2008 p.210

*town's football ground. On one side of it is a public park; on the other is a belt of land once considered for a road which was never built and which has since become covered in a tangle of wild vetches, inhabited by grass snakes. All three are greenspace, but only the third is wildscape."*¹⁵

A wildscape, in other words, is a space where vegetation has been left to grow freely simply because nothing has been done to intervene it. Similarly, the defining concept of a wastespace is the fact that it has been abandoned: any activity that takes place within it is accidental and unintentional.

¹⁵ Shoard, 2011

In this thesis the term urban wastespace refers to the embodiment of the concept of waste applied to a space: an area that is, in the collective eye of the society in which it is situated, considered to be of no use, unproductive or dead.

These spaces inspire a sense of uncertainty and sometimes fear in most of us, but they also tickle our imagination. Before briefly presenting some real life examples of wastespaces, and then moving on to the former Pruitt-Igoe site, we take a look at a few instances of wastespaces being depicted in fiction.

The Zone.
Still from Andrei
Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, 1979.
Image: Kino International



In Carson McCullers' novel *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, the character Mick, a young girl, climbs on the top of a house that is being built.

“ The house was almost finished. It would be one of the largest buildings in the neighborhood – two storeys, with very high ceilings and the steepest roof of any house she had ever seen. But soon the work would all be finished. The carpenters would leave and the kids would have to find another place to play.”¹⁶

The not yet finished house is a temporary wastespace. It is a place of escape for Mick, and it allows her to act differently than she would in relation to an ordinary house – she can climb on the roof of it and be alone. But the house is on its way to become finished, and once it is, it will no longer be a wastespace. It is only in its current state that it is defined by what it is not – complete – and therefore deemed as temporarily ‘useless’.

¹⁶ McCullers, 1953 p.34

The unfinished house in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* is a small-scale example of a wastespace depicted in fiction. For wastespaces on a larger scale, the abandoned, decaying cityscapes often described in science fiction come to mind. The dystopia of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* has turned the whole of Los Angeles, perhaps the whole of Earth, into a wastespace; a space left behind for waste people while those who can move to new and better environments on other planets. In Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, the characters explore *the Zone*, an abandoned wasteland that offers supernatural threats and, ultimately, the supposed potential to grant their innermost wishes. These are spaces that are no longer fit to be used as originally intended. Supernatural or not, their characteristics are those of the abandoned, the decaying, the near dead.

That the wastespace inspires fear and uncertainty is obvious by its frequent presence in fiction of the horror genre. The deserted buildings in these stories often retain dark memories of their pasts, and the creaking floors, spider webs and dusty furniture inside them acquire an aspect of threat that we

would not associate with those same objects were they not abandoned.

By looking at the use and description of wastespaces in fiction, the particular possibilities and significance of these environments become evident. We will return to this in the chapter about the Merits of Wastespaces.

4.2 Wastespaces in reality

Just walking through any city, town, or village, you will see a wastespace. From small patches of grass and dandelions in a back alley to vast areas of disused industrial buildings, these spaces are anything but uncommon. Some areas, however, are more affected by abandonment than others.

In the US, Detroit, Michigan may be the most dramatic example of urban abandonment. Once a hub of commerce and industry, today, nearly half of the city's 138 square miles are vacant.¹⁷ According to the US Census Bureau, the population of Detroit went from 1.850.000 in 1950 to 911.000 by 2003.¹⁸ The result is a fascinating wasteland of a city, frequently photographed, filmed, studied and written about. The aesthetics of the Detroit ruins have, in some cases, been romanticised and made into what Kevin Lynch calls 'ruin porn'¹⁹ but historian Christopher Woodward writes of his visit to the increasingly abandoned city:

¹⁷ Fein, 2012 zfein.com

¹⁸ Woodward, 2012 in Jorgensen Keenan (ed.) *Urban Wildscapes* p.19

¹⁹ Lynch, 1990

“ At one point I was so depressed by the dereliction that I walked back to the small island of commercial activity. After miles of cracked concrete, leafless ivy and congealed litter it was reassuring to see new plastic tables in McDonald's, window-cleaners, doors that opened, and to breath the new, shiny smell of fresh paperbacks in Borders.”²⁰

Because of the ambiguous nature of the wastespace, Detroit is a city of depression and danger, but also of realized and unrealized potential. Woodward notes that 'the city is a case study of the possibilities created by dereliction, from urban farming to new aesthetics.'²¹

Another American wastespace, literally made out of masses of garbage and storing many traumatic memories, is the former Fresh Kills Landfill on Staten Island outside of New York. The landfill was established in 1948 by the City of New York. Seven years later, Fresh Kills was the largest landfill in the

²⁰ Ibid p.21

²¹ Ibid p. 20



Detroit. Still from the Heidi Ewing's and Rachel Grady's documentary 'Detropia', 2012.
Image: Loki Films

world, serving as the end destination for all household garbage collected in New York City.²² Between 1986 and 1987, Fresh Kills would receive up to 29.000 tons of garbage per day. Today, the site is made up of four landfill mounds, consisting of a total of around 150 million tons of solid waste. In the beginning of 2001, Fresh Kills ceased to accept solid waste, however, after the attack on The World Trade Center in September of the same year, the landfill was temporarily opened to accept rubble from Ground Zero. The material is placed in a separate area within the landfill's boundaries. It is covered by a layer of soil and marked to prevent disturbance.²³ Later in 2001, the City of New York opened a two-stage international design competition for development of a master plan, transforming the landfill into a park. A team led by landscape architecture firm Field Operations designed the winning proposal.

²² City of New York Parks & Recreation, nycgovparks.org

²³ Ibid.

In 2008, journalist Robert Sullivan describes Fresh Kills in an article for New York Magazine:

“ (Fresh Kills) was once a steaming, stinking, seagull-infested mountain of trash, a peak that is now green, or greenish, or maybe more like a green-hued brown, the tall grasses having been recently mown by the sanitation workers still operating at Fresh Kills, on the western shore of Staten Island. Today the sun dries the once slime-covered slopes, as a few hawks circle in big, slow swoops (...). It's a great wide-open bowl, fringed with green hills (some real, some garbage-filled) that are some of the highest points on the Atlantic seaboard south of Maine.”

Today, as in 2008, Fresh Kills is in the process of being put into order, and as it is slowly becoming an ordered public space, it is losing its status as a wastespace. However, the fact that the development of the area will be the transformation of what was once the largest landfill in the world gives it unique symbolical value.

On the website of the City of New Yorks Parks & Recreation, it is stated that

“ the park’s design, ecological restoration and cultural and educational programming will emphasize environmental sustainability and a renewed public concern for our human impact on the earth.”

We will return to these real life examples of wastespaces, and examples on how they have been dealt with, in the chapter about Design Approaches. However, the main case study used in this thesis is the wastespace left behind after the demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe social housing project in St. Louis, Missouri.



Top: Fresh Kills Landfill
Photo: Stephen Ferry/Getty images
Left: Visualization of Fresh Kills Park
Image: Field Operations



One of the Pruitt Igoe buildings being demolished.
Photo: Pruitt Igoe Now

“ Modern Architecture died in St. Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3.32 pm (or thereabouts) when the infamous Pruitt Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final coup de grâce by dynamite.”

- Charles Jencks, The New Paradigm in Architecture, 1977

In 2011, the group *Pruitt Igoe Now*¹ organized a worldwide call for ideas for what should be done about the site formerly occupied by the Pruitt-Igoe social housing project in St. Louis, Missouri. In 1972, when the first few of the project’s 33 slab blocks were demolished, Charles Jencks referred to the event as ‘the death of Modernism’. Written almost forty years after the iconic video of one of the buildings imploding

¹ pruittigoenow.org. Competition managers: Michael R. Allen, Director of the St. Louis Preservation Research Office and Nora Wendl, Assistant Professor of Design in the Department of Architecture at Portland State University

was taped, the competition brief for the *Pruitt Igoe Now* competition states that the ‘rebirth’ the demolition of the project was intended to foster has never arrived. Instead, the site it left behind is covered by a dark, fenced-in forest. It remains untouched and seemingly inaccessible, a black hole in the urban fabric of St. Louis.

The Pruitt-Igoe site is the result of a turbulent chapter in the history of St. Louis. Built in the 1950’s, the Pruitt-Igoe social housing project was part of a larger plan to clear the slum areas of St. Louis for new developments. The project, consisting of 33 eleven-story slab blocks, was intended to give its future inhabitants homes with increased sunlight, beautiful views, and a higher social standard than they had ever experienced before. However, for a spectrum of reasons, the project did not live up to these expectations. The buildings, which were never fully occupied, started deteriorating quickly.



Sign seen from Jefferson Avenue on the fence surrounding the Pruitt-igoe forest. It reads: "VANDALS & TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED." Photo by author.

Theft and violent crime were commonplace and there was not enough money coming in from rents to pay for maintenance of the buildings.¹ Many blame the architects for the failure of the project, pointing out problems such as skip-stop elevators forcing residents into stairwells as well as the sheer size and repetitiveness of the project's design.² However, the reasons for Pruitt-Igoe's notoriety are complex and also involve economical, social and political factors, many of which affected the whole of St. Louis, and some all of the US, in the 50's, 60's and 70's. Even so, the image of one of the first of the buildings being demolished has become a powerful symbol for St. Louis ridding itself of its social problems, like the symbolic removal of a tumor. After the site was completely cleared in 1977, more and more of the buildings around

¹ Mars, 2012 Podcast

² Competition Brief, 2011 pruittigoenow.org

the site have been abandoned and now lie in ruins.

The site where the Pruitt-Igoe social housing project once stood has now been abandoned for more than thirty-five years. Perhaps even longer: looking through the definitions and characteristics that apply to urban wastespaces, it is possible to assert that Pruitt-Igoe – and the people who lived there – became regarded as 'waste' long before the first of its buildings was demolished.

The images from 1972 of one of the Pruitt-Igoe buildings imploding in a giant cloud of smoke have been the lingering and seemingly conclusive images of the Pruitt-Igoe project. It is used as picture evidence of the failure of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project, and the dramatic and powerful nature of the images has contributed to Pruitt-Igoe also coming to symbolize failure on a much larger and general

scale: the failure of modernism, and the failure of social housing. It is a lot for one housing project to bear, and it is also a simplification of reality. To find the moment when Pruitt-Igoe went from being the shiny housing of the future to today's wasteland, we go back to the time and place of the birth of the project, St. Louis in the 1940's.



A family of future Pruitt-Igoe residents.
Still from Chad Freidrich's
The Pruitt Igoe Myth, 2011.
Image: Unicorn Stencil

BEFORE PRUITT-IGOE

By the end of the 1940's, in St. Louis as well as in hundreds of other American cities post-war, the white middle classes started moving in increasing numbers out of the city centers and into the suburbs. This also resulted in an expansion of the city slums as poor families moved into the central housing units left behind. At this time, the slums in St. Louis, largely racially segregated (black people in the North and white people in the South) formed a ring around the central business district. The Northern slum areas in particular were expanding during this period, as there was an increase in black immigration to St. Louis from the South of the US in the post-war era. This expansion caused concern to the city officials and the local business community.¹ It was feared that the spread of the slums would decrease the property values in the more central areas.

¹ Bristol, 1991

The slums were poorly maintained by so-called 'slumlords' and did begin to form an unsanitary and unsafe ring around the city. In 1949, with funding from the 1949 United States Housing Act, the St. Louis Housing Authority and the St. Louis Clearance and Redevelopment Authority decided as part of a large development plan that concerned the whole of St. Louis, to 'liberate' the city from these slum areas. A number of both political and private parties with economical interests in the city also supported this plan. By removing the eyesore of the slums, the city would become more attractive and possibilities for profitable new construction would open up.²

To some extent, the goal of the development plan was to attract the middle-classes to move back into the city from the suburbs, as many of

² Freidrichs, 2012



Promotional illustrations for Pruitt-Igoe.
 Images: Pruitt Igoe Now
 When Art History goes Bad blog

the cleared plots would be sold at a low price to private developers and become sites for middle-income housing and commercial development.¹ However, the St. Louis Housing Authority was to clear certain slum areas in order to replace them with social housing. Included in this part of the plan was the development of a large-scale project in the Northern part of St. Louis, which would replace the slum area of Desoto-Carr and provide new homes for the people who had lived there. This was the Pruitt-Igoe housing project. It was to become the home for 15,000 residents in more than 2,700 housing units separated into two racially segregated parts: The Captain Wendell O. Pruitt homes (for black people) and the William L. Igoe apartments (for white people). Architects Hellmuth, Yamasaki & Leinweber were commissioned by the St. Louis Housing Authority to design the project. However, there were several restraints: the size

¹ Bristol, 1991

and positioning of the site, the number of units and the density of the project were all predetermined. The Public Housing Administration also insisted on the scheme consisting of 33 eleven-story slab buildings.²

In the planning process, the Pruitt-Igoe project became the symbol of rebirth, a new possibility for the poor population of St. Louis, who had now been 'liberated'. The new apartments would be modern, well equipped, bright and large enough for everyone in the family to have their own bed: all things that many people had never experienced before.³ The area was to be provided with play areas and green spaces. In *Architectural Forum* in 1951, the not-yet-built project receives high praise:

² Ibid.

³ Mars, 2012 Podcast

“Replacing ramshackle old houses jammed with people, and rats, will be 11-story apartment houses which even unbuilt have already begun to change the public housing pattern in other cities. Skip-stop elevator service will be combined with open galleries every third floor to build vertical neighborhoods for poor people in the city, which up to now, have lived 90 percent in single houses. Compared with the unimaginative public housing prototypes the architects were given to match, the new plans save not only people, but money, and as instructive as the buildings is the site design; a city-purchased park will be stretched out to wind through the area like a river.”¹

¹ Architectural Forum, April 1951 "Slum Surgery in St. Louis"

Even before the project was built, however, the architects' design for the Pruitt-Igoe project had to be changed and cut for financial reasons, meaning that several features proposed by the architects were never realized. For example, many of the planned children's play areas were never built.²

² Allen, Interview 2013-04-11



The Pruitt-Igoe housing project. Photo: United States Geological Survey

DURING PRUITT-IGOE

The Pruitt Homes, named after an African-American fighter pilot, were completed on September 1, 1954, and the Igoe Apartments, named after a white congressman, on February 26, 1956.

During the youth of its short life, the Pruitt-Igoe project was a success. In 1957, the occupancy rate was 91%: the highest it would ever be. In the documentary *The Pruitt Igoe Myth* (2011), directed by Chad Freidrichs, a number of former residents talk about their happy memories of first moving into Pruitt-Igoe. It is described as an ‘oasis in the desert’ of the surrounding slum, and as a definite and dramatic step up in living standards. However, there were a lot of opponents to the idea of social housing. Because of the split opinions on the project and the politics behind it, only the construction of the buildings was federally funded, whereas the

upkeep and maintenance of the finished project was to be financed solely by the rents provided by the tenants. While this strategy originally worked, it started to collapse a few years after the inauguration of Pruitt-Igoe. At this time, as earlier mentioned, American cities were emptying out because of the increased popularity and raised standards of living in the suburbs.¹ This resulted in dramatic and dire consequences for the Pruitt-Igoe project. When the area was first built, it was populated by both black and white low- to middle income population, but a few years in, most of the white and middle income residents had moved out², making Pruitt-Igoe a racially segregated area with most of its residents relying on welfare. The subsequent decline in income from rents meant that there was not enough money to pay for the maintenance of the buildings,

¹ Freidrichs, 2012

² Bristol, 1991



Children and teacher on the Pruitt-Igoe grounds.
Photo: State Historical Society of Missouri

even though the rents were raised several times, meaning that some residents paid three quarters of their monthly income in rent.¹

The demographic structure of the Pruitt-Igoe inhabitants had certain unusual features. Only 38 % of families had a male household head.² One of the reasons for the large number of single-mother households was that welfare regulations prevented able-bodied males to live on the grounds.³ In sociologist Lee Rainwater's book *Behind Ghetto Walls – Black Families in a Federal Slum*, studying the community of Pruitt-Igoe, the author notes that in 1965, almost 70% of the inhabitants of Pruitt-Igoe were minors. Out of these, 70% were under 12 years old.⁴

¹ Dpt. of Housing and Urban Development. 1974

² Rainwater, 1971 p.11

³ Freidrichs, 2012

⁴ Rainwater, 1971 p.11

In 1966, The Pruitt Igoe Neighborhood Corporation published a pamphlet, in which a dismal picture of the state of Pruitt-Igoe is painted:

“ When one drives or walks into Pruitt-Igoe, he is confronted by a dismal sight. Glass, rubble and debris litter the streets... abandoned automobiles have been left in the parking areas; glass is omnipresent (...). As the visitor nears the entrance to a building, the filth and debris intensify. Mice, roaches, and other vermin thrive in these open areas... Paint has peeled from the elevator walls. The stench of urine is overwhelming (...) When the visitor emerges from the dark, stench-filled elevator on to one of the building's gallery floors, he enters a grey concrete caricature of an insane asylum. Incinerators, too small to accommodate

the quantity of refuse placed into them, have spilled over – trash and garbage are heaped on the floors. Light bulbs and fixtures are out; bare hot wire often dangles from malfunctioning light sockets.”¹

In 1969, the decline of the buildings had gone so far that the remaining tenants decided to stage a rent strike. This resulted in the rent being lowered and limited to no more than a quarter of the payer’s income. It was, however, too late. In 1970, the water pipeline in one of buildings broke, causing a leak that immediately froze because of the sub zero temperature of the season. The heating no longer worked, and over 10.000 of the Pruitt-Igoe buildings’ windows were broken. Many of the elevators had stopped working and garbage was left in piles in the hallways. A cycle of neglect and violence

¹ Pruitt-Igoe Neighborhood Corporation, 1966

had started. There was no maintenance and no surveillance, which created an environment of discontentment and anger on the part of the tenants. This laid the ground for illegal activity and vandalism, which in turn stigmatized the area, causing police, authorities and maintenance workers to fear and neglect it.² As early as 1960, St Louis Department stores had ended all deliveries to Pruitt-Igoe addresses.³ Around the same time, Western Union stated that they would stop delivering telegrams to Pruitt-Igoe, but changed its decision after a few days, on the condition that delivery boys would be accompanied by armed guards while on the project’s grounds.⁴ Even the city police were advised to be extra careful around the Pruitt-Igoe site.

² Freidrichs, 2012
³ Winchester, 1974
⁴ Ibid.

One directive read:

“ Police must not sound sirens when approaching the Pruitt-Igoe homes. The residents come from the chain-gang and blood-hound country of the Deep South and are likely to react violently to sirens.”¹

By the late 60’s and early 1970’s, Pruitt-Igoe was nearly abandoned. In pictures of the project from this time, the buildings look almost like ruins. Drug users and gangs used the empty buildings for illicit activity and the few remaining tenants, to a large extent consisting of single mothers with children, lived in fear of being attacked or robbed when walking through the area that was their home.²

¹ Winchester, 1974
² Freidrichs, 2012

Despite the Federal Government granting in total 10 million USD in expenditures and repairs of the project during the early 1960’s³, in the early 1970’s it was decided that the project was unsalvageable. The remaining tenants of the Pruitt-Igoe project were moved to 11 buildings on March 16, 1972, in order to carry out a demolition experiment leveling one of the centrally situated buildings. A second building went down in April of the same year, and in 1973, the 800 or so remaining inhabitants of Pruitt-Igoe were relocated and the remaining buildings were demolished with a headache ball. The last of the 33 Pruitt-Igoe buildings was demolished in 1977.⁴

³ Schmidt, 2012 Missouri Wonk
⁴ Bristol, 1991



AFTER PRUITT-IGOE

Since the project's demolition, a number of different plans have been developed for the vacant site. It has been imagined as a state penitentiary, as a part of an industrial- and warehouse park, a retail center and a golf course. None of these plans have been realized.

The site remained untouched until 1989 when St. Louis Public Schools decided to build the Gateway Schools Complex on 20 acres of the Southwest corner of the site. Outside the borders of the Gateway School's 20 acres, the Pruitt-Igoe forest is left to grow in silence.

Today, the former Pruitt-Igoe site is part of developer Paul J. McKee, Jr.'s large development plan "Northside Regeneration" for the Near North side of St. Louis. It is, however, unclear what the precise plan is for the site within this

redevelopment, and no concrete plans are in motion.¹

¹ Allen, Interview 2013-04-11

Young Pruitt-Igoe resident and trash left behind after the demolition.
Still from Chad Freidrich's
The Pruitt Igoe Myth, 2011.
Image: Unicorn Stencil



TIMELINE SHOWED IN MASTER'S THESIS FINAL EXHIBITION, MODIFIED TO BETTER FIT THE FORMAT OF THE BOOK

TIMELINE before Pruitt-Igoe until today

the FACTS

the SITE and its inhabitants

the NUMBERS

1940's
POST-WAR HOUSING
SHORTAGE

1937 The FEDERAL HOUSING ACT of 1937 establishes subsidies paid from the US Government. The plan to realize several social housing projects in St. Louis, among them Pruitt-Igoe, is introduced but there is no funding with which to realize them.

1949 The FEDERAL HOUSING ACT of 1949 establishes federal financing for "slum clearance". The idea is criticized, critics saying "slum removal" ultimately means "negro removal".

1950 The Federal Public Housing Authority commits to building 5800 public housing units in St. Louis of which 2970 will consist of the Pruitt-Igoe project. Architects Hellmuth, Yamasaki and Leinweber are commissioned, under severe financial restraints, to design the project.

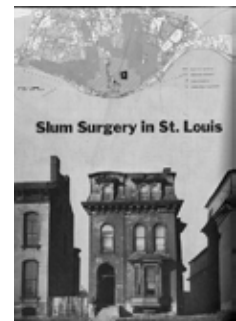


Left: Architects Hellmuth, Yamasaki and Leinweber discuss around a model of the Pruitt-Igoe project.

Above: The DeSoto Carr slum neighborhood



DeSoto Carr Slum Neighborhood, demolished to build the Pruitt-Igoe project in 1955



Slum Surgery in St. Louis

PRUITT-IGOE

1955-1956 The original plan for Pruitt-Igoe was for the project to be a two-part, segregated social housing area. The Igoe Apartments were to be a white area, and the Pruitt Homes were to be a black one. The Igoe Apartments are finished in 1954, and the Pruitt Homes in 1956.

1957 Pruitt-Igoe occupancy peaks at 91%. At the same time, the decline of maintenance of the buildings start.



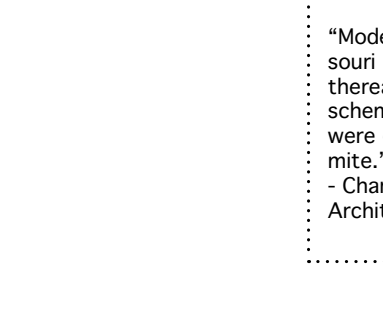
Pruitt-Igoe site 1956

1968 Pruitt-Igoe's reputation deteriorates. A newspaper clipping titled "Low-Rise Replacement Urged" and "Pruitt Igoe Called Menace" is shown.



The Pruitt-Igoe project seen from South-East

1969 A RENT STRIKE is initiated by the remaining inhabitants of the Pruitt-Igoe project. It lasts 9 months.



"Modern Architecture died in St. Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3.32 pm (or thereabouts) when the infamous Pruitt Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final coup de grâce by dynamite."
- Charles Jencks, The New Paradigm in Architecture, 1977

1972-1973 March 16th 1972: All remaining residents are moved to 11 buildings, and one centrally placed building is demolished. On April 21 of the same year, a second building goes down. In 1973, St. Louis Housing Authority officially decides to "cease operation" of Pruitt-Igoe. The 800 remaining tenants are relocated and the demolition of the rest of the buildings begins.

1977 All the Pruitt-Igoe buildings, except the Pruitt school, have been demolished.



"...parts laying in that rubble is your history, your life. That was my youth, you know? But... to see (the buildings) imploded, it was bittersweet for me. Yeah, they're gone, but now... nobody'll ever know my story. If nothing else, they should have left one of them as a monument to how never to treat people."

Former resident interviewed about Pruitt-Igoe for the Pruitt Igoe Myth documentary by Chad Friedrichs

END OF PRUITT-IGOE

1989 The City Plan Commission and Board of Aldermen propose to put the Pruitt-Igoe site in the center of an industrial- and warehouse park. The proposal is never realized. In the same year, it is decided that part of the site will be the site of the new Gateway Schools Complex.



Pruitt-Igoe site 1996

1995 The Gateway schools complex opens. It consists of three schools: Gateway Elementary School, Gateway Michael School, and Gateway Middle School, and the complex takes up 20 acres of the site.



Above: Students from Gateway Schools Complex Below: the Gateway Schools Complex



Pruitt-Igoe site 2012

2011 The open design competition PRUITT IGOE NOW is opened, calling for design ideas for the former Pruitt Igoe-site. Director Chad Friedrichs' film THE PRUITT-IGOE MYTH comes out.

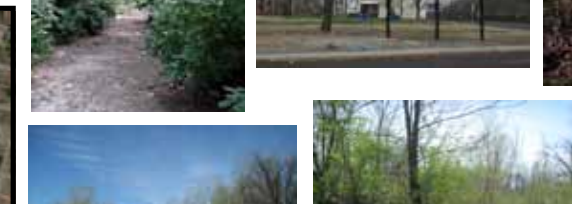
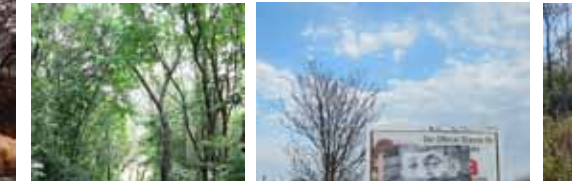


PRUITT-IGOE NOW: THE UNRECOGNIZED MODERN LANDSCAPE Today the site of the Pruitt Igoe housing project is an evergreen forested forest marking modern architecture's most contested moment and its least: urban renewal. As the legacy of Pruitt Igoe is critically examined again, the site itself becomes. Can the site be reclaimed from a toxic and overhyped past through re-imagining and community engagement? We need your answer. CALL FOR DESIGN IDEAS. Details are online by Friday, March 10, 2012, at pruittnow.org

2012 The finalists and winner of the Pruitt-Igoe Now competition are announced, and a nation-wide touring exhibition of the finalist proposal starts.



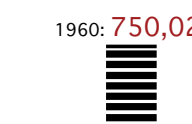
Pruitt-Igoe site 2012



The Pruitt-Igoe site today, seen from South

"The verdant and budding spring landscape here is lovely, as traces of green pop off of infinitesimal branches. Soft flowers emerge, scenting the site with promise. By early summer, honeysuckle is abundant on the outer fence line, forming a concertina wire of white blossoms."

- Michael R. Allen, director of the St. Louis Preservation Research Office, on nextcity.org



POPULATION COUNT IN SAINT LOUIS CITY



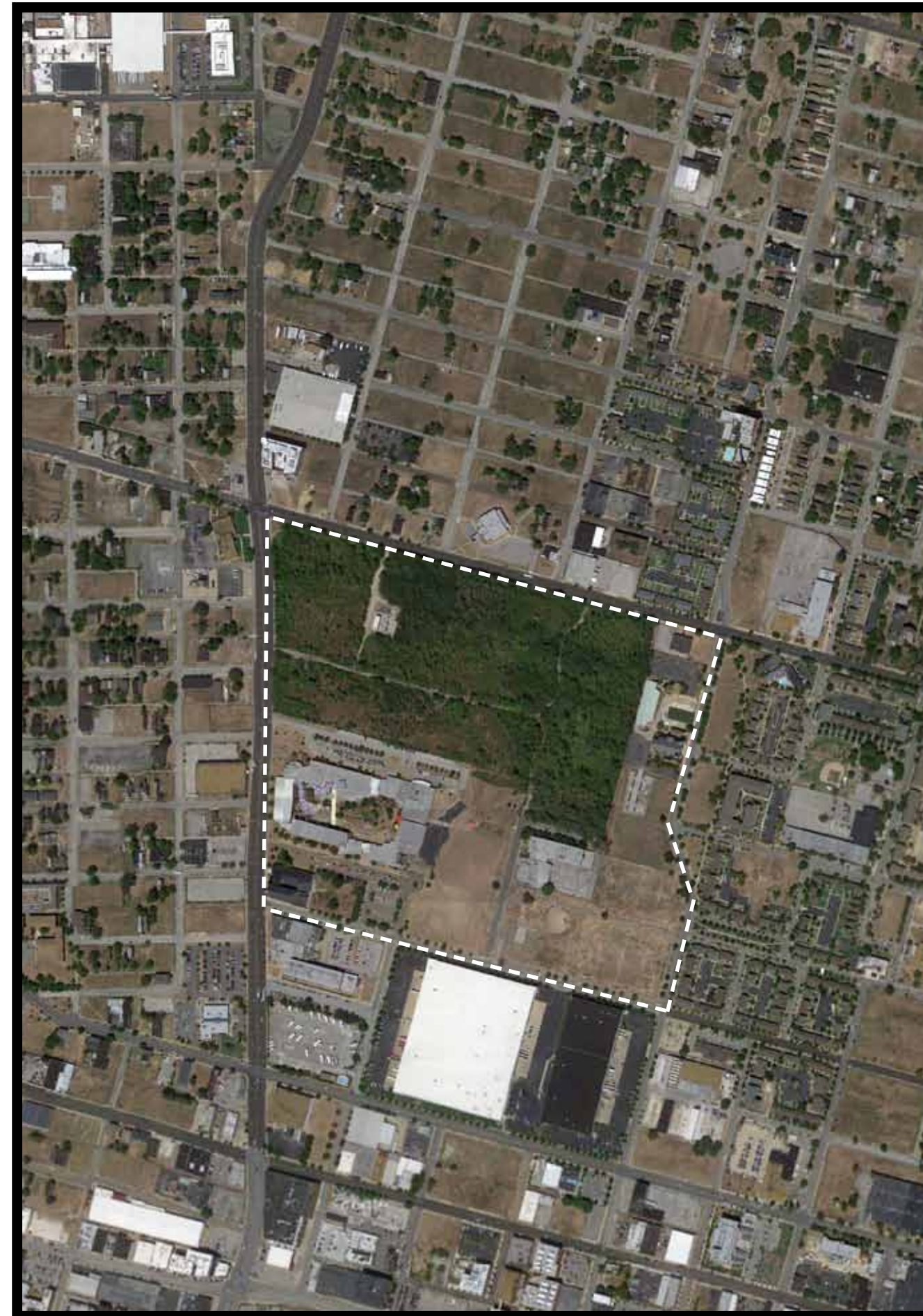
Pruitt-Igoe site 1956

The Pruitt-Igoe site during the short lifetime
of the project.

Aerial photos: Pruitt-Igoe Now Competition pruittigonenow.org



The Pruitt-Igoe project seen from South-East



Pruitt-Igoe site 2012

The Pruitt-Igoe site today.

Aerial photos: ©2013 Digital Globe, US Geological Survey,
USDA Farm Service Agency, Map Data © 2013 Google



The Pruitt-Igoe site today, seen from South

The Pruitt-Igoe Forest, 2013.
Photo by author



Walking on the former Pruitt-Igoe site today, notions of death and nothingness seem far away. The dense forest, which in the Pruitt Igoe Now design competition brief is called ‘the most prominent accidental urban forest in America’¹, is colorful and undoubtedly alive. The nature on the site is flourishing. Michael R. Allen, historian and the director of the St. Louis Preservation Research Office, as well as one of the organizers of the Pruitt Igoe Now Design Competition, writes in an article of what lies behind the ‘menacing tree line’ at Pruitt-Igoe:

“The verdant and budding spring landscape here is lovely, as traces of green pop off of infinitesimal branches. Soft flowers emerge, scenting the site with promise. By early summer, honeysuckle is abundant on the outer

¹ Competition Brief, 2011 pruittigoenow.org

fence lines, forming a concertina wire of white blossoms.”²

On a sunny Sunday in April, the sound of families playing football and barbecuing in DeSoto park is completely drowned out once you enter the Pruitt-Igoe forest. There are soft noises of life in the bushes and trees, you can see hares and birds, and the smell is not one you normally sense in the city. Throughout the forest, debris and rubble as well as household trash have been dumped, accumulating around the edges of the site that are easily accessible by car.

DeSoto park, in the Southeast corner of the site, is poorly maintained but used by local football clubs for practice, as well as by families living in the housing area South- and Northeast of the site. These areas, built in the last ten years, consist of mostly two-story townhouses.

² Allen, 2011

Directly South of the site the closeness to downtown St Louis is hidden by two large warehouse buildings, while in the North, the abandonment is more widespread. Walking North from the site up towards St. Louis Avenue, some of the abandoned houses look more like heaps of rubble than former homes, but in between them lay still inhabited houses.

To better understand the site and the community still alive on and around it, we zoom out and take a look at the city of which it is a part, the city of St. Louis.



Top left: abandoned building on Lynch Street, South St. Louis

Top right: abandoned donut shop on Jefferson Avenue

Far right: The Gateway Arch

Right: Downtown St. Louis

Photos by author.



In the early 1900's, St. Louis was America's fourth largest city. It was known as the 'Gateway to the West', as it was the starting point for the westward movement of settlers, adventurers and pioneers in the United States during the 1800's. In 1904, St. Louis hosted the World's Fair, attracting around 20 million visitors, and, in the same year, the city hosted the summer Olympic games. The 192 meters tall Gateway Arch, finished in 1965, remains a memorial of the role St. Louis played in American westward expansion.

After the Second World War, St. Louis started to lose population, many of its inhabitants leaving the city to move to its suburbs. According to the US Census Bureau, in 2010, St. Louis had slightly over 319.000 inhabitants. This means that the decline in population that began in the 1950's is still in process. Being built for more than twice as many people as it

currently houses, St. Louis is a city of widespread abandonment.

The former Pruitt-Igoe site is situated in the Northern part of the city in the midst of an area that is one of the poorest in St. Louis. The neighborhood of which it is a part, as well as the neighborhoods surrounding it, all have populations of over 90% African-Americans.¹ St. Louis is generally a clearly racially segregated city, with a majority of white persons living in the South, and a majority of black persons living in the North.

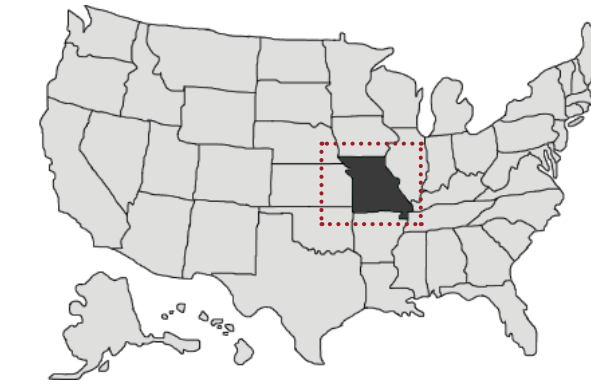
St. Louis' public transport system consists of a MetroLink train that runs in the East-West direction as well as a network of bus-lines reaching most parts of the city. The former Pruitt-Igoe site is well connected to the downtown area by buses. In St.Louis, like in

¹ US Census Bureau, 2010

many US cities, most people use driving as their premier mode of transportation. However, in the poorer parts of the city, of which the former Pruitt-Igoe site is a part, many rely on public transport.

The following maps aim to briefly present the structure of the city of St. Louis, show the situation of the former Pruitt-Igoe site within it and, finally, map the site's relation to central St. Louis.

THE CONTEXT: MAPPING ST. LOUIS



MISSOURI



CITY OF ST. LOUIS
Population 2010: 319,294

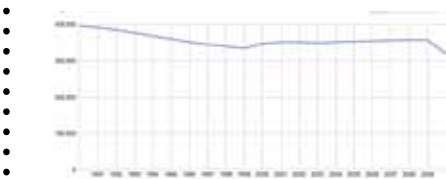
POPULATION HISTORY OF ST LOUIS

1830-1990

year	rank	population
1830	57	4977
1840	24	16469
1850	8	77860
1860	8	160773
1870	4	310864
1880	6	350518
1890	5	451770
1900	4	575238
1910	4	687029
1920	6	772897
1930	7	821960
1940	8	816048
1950	8	856796
1960	10	750026
1970	18	622236
1980	26	453085
1990	34	396685

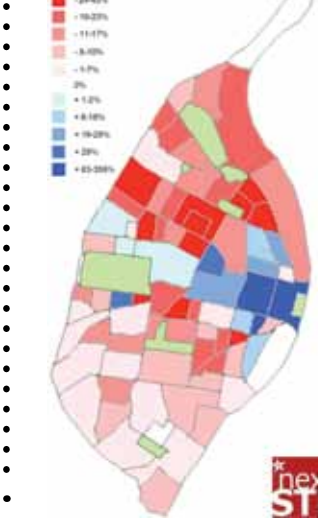
1990-2010

Population change 1990-2010



Source:
US Census
Bureau

City of St. Louis Neighborhoods Population Change 2000-2010



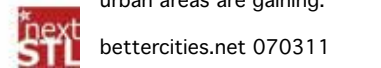
Overall decline in population between 2000 and 2010 of 8%, however:

"Big winners: the most urban parts of St. Louis. St. Louis's once-desolate downtown gained population in huge numbers, and near-downtown areas like Soulard, Lafayette Square and the Central West End gained population."

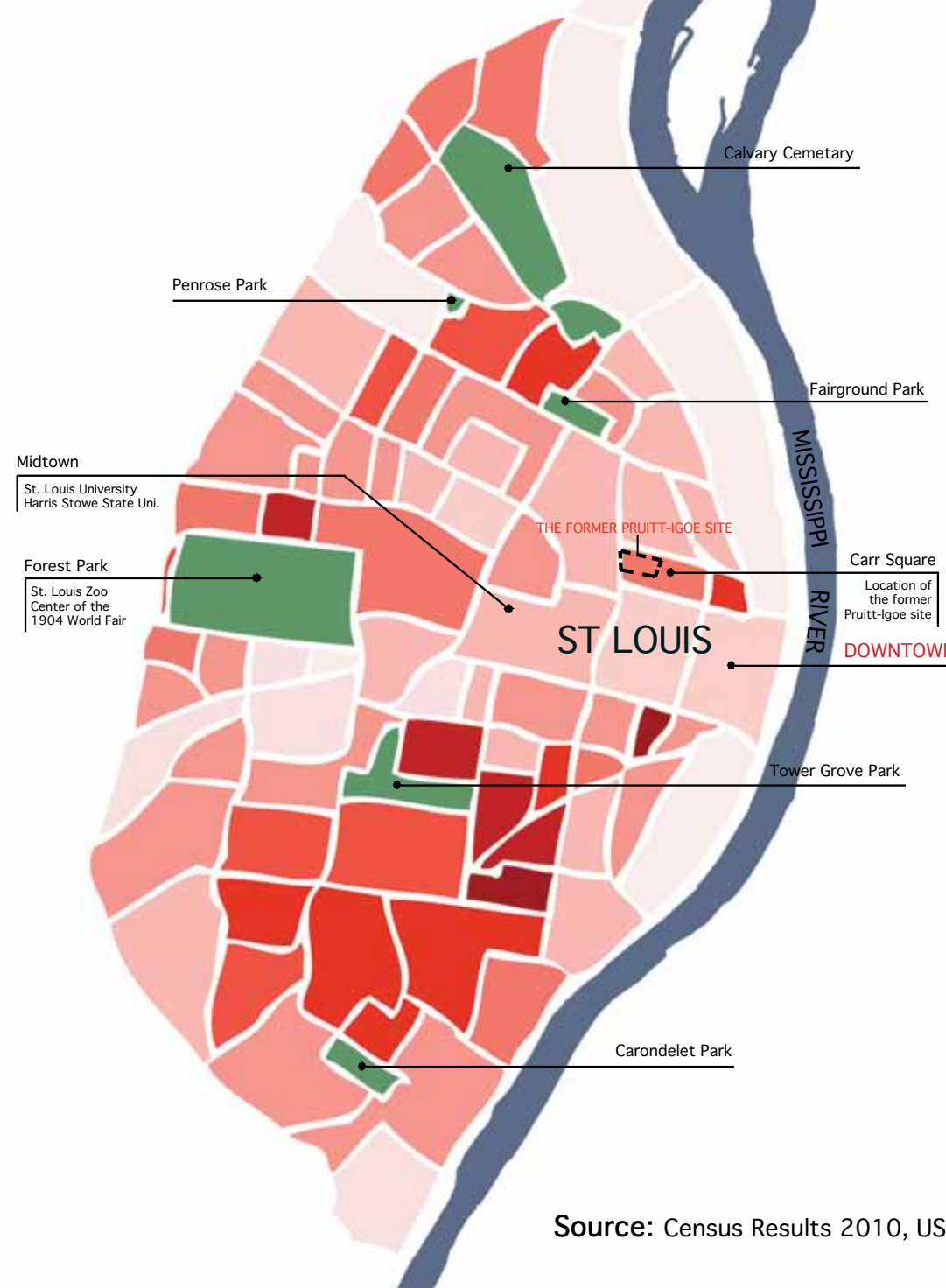
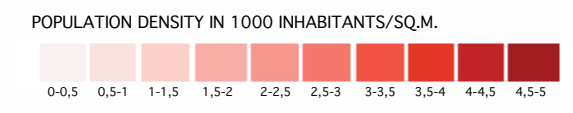
"The losers? The bad neighborhoods on the North Side and the more pseudo-suburban areas in the South Side."

"So what does this tell me? That even in St. Louis, a city that has lost population faster than Detroit over the past few decades, the MOST urban areas are gaining."

Source: US Census Bureau



CITY OF ST. LOUIS



Source: Census Results 2010, US Census Bureau

Distribution of main racial and ethnic groups

- 1 DOT = 200 PEOPLE
- Black
 - White
 - Asian
 - Hispanic



Source of data: 2005-9 American Community Survey, Census Bureau; socialexplorer.com

Median home value

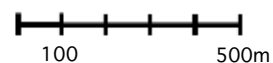
- MEDIAN HOME VALUE IN 100,000 USD
- 0-0,5
 - 0,5-1
 - 1-2
 - 2-4
 - >4



Source of data: 2005-9 American Community Survey, Census Bureau; socialexplorer.com


NEIGHBORHOODS

 Former Pruitt-Igoe Site



GREEN AREAS, RECREATION AND CULTURE

 Former Pruitt-Igoe Site

 Green areas, parks and plazas

 Culture, Sports or Recreation

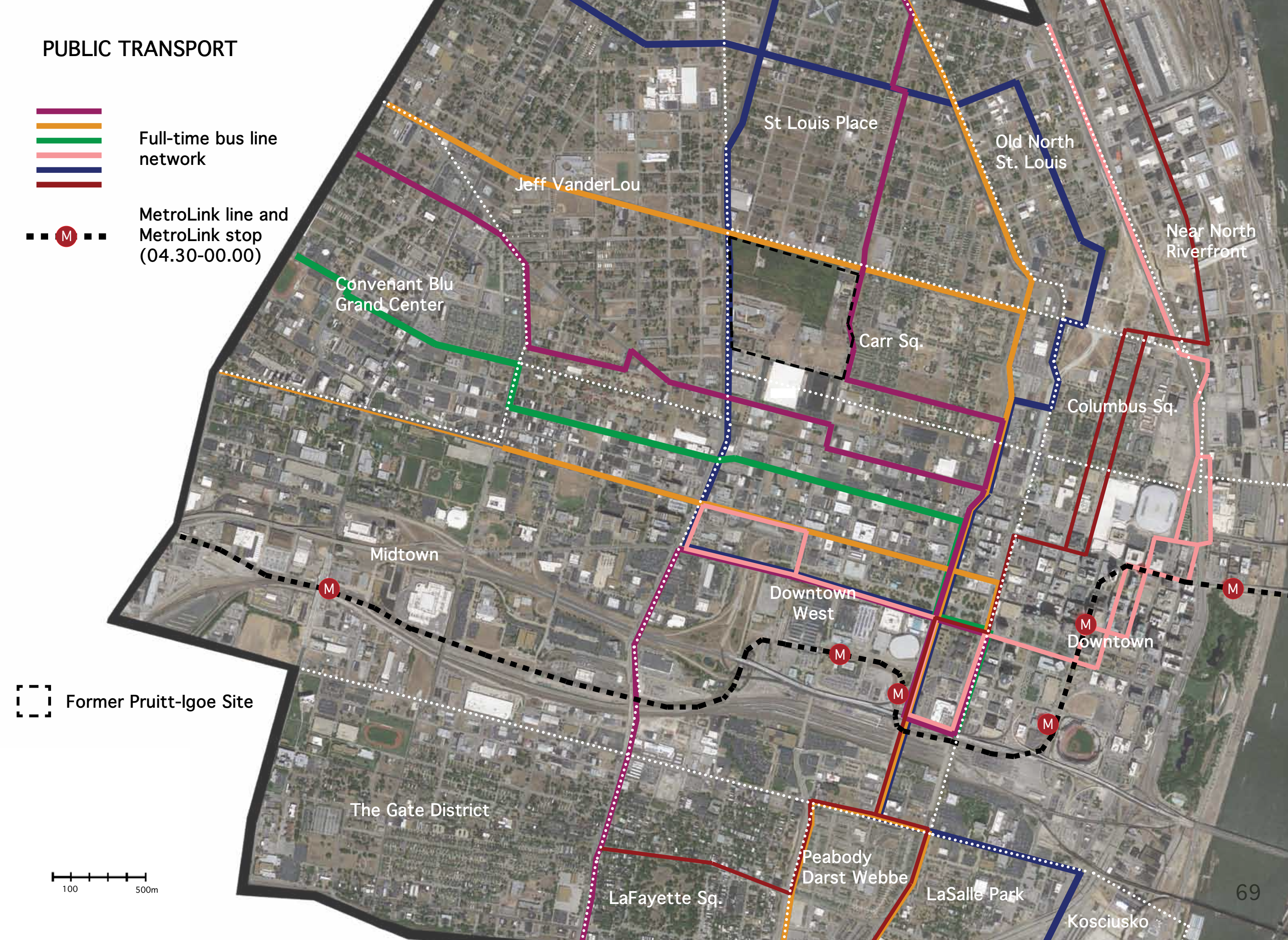


PUBLIC TRANSPORT

 Full-time bus line network

 MetroLink line and MetroLink stop (04.30-00.00)

 Former Pruitt-Igoe Site



Standing 192 meters above ground level, on the top of St. Louis' central, shiny Gateway Arch, the overgrown former Pruitt-Igoe site is faintly distinguishable if you know in which direction to look. When the Pruitt-Igoe buildings were still standing, however, they must have been difficult to miss. The site is quite centrally located, but the industrial area and especially the two large warehouse buildings immediately to the South of the site serve to disguise this close connection.

The site itself is located within the borders of the Carr Square neighborhood, home to 2,774 inhabitants.¹ To the North stretches the neighborhood of St.Louis Place, a large part of which consists of vacant lots and abandoned buildings.

¹ US Census Bureau, 2010

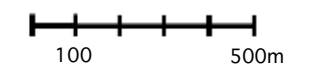
In the area on and around the site there is a remarkable number of active schools, daycare centers and churches, as well as several areas of new housing developments.

The following maps show a zoomed-in area closer to the site to show the functions and programs still existing on and around it, as well as the extension of abandonment. They also show a closer perspective of the site and which buildings and fragments remain from before and during the Pruitt-Igoe period as well as what has been built (and what has grown) after its demolition.

MAPPING THE SITE

ZOOMED IN AREA

 Former Pruitt-Igoe Site



START OF DENSELY
BUILT RESIDENTIAL AREA
- END OF WIDE-
SPREAD ABANDONMENT



1. Yeatman Square Park
Tennis courts

Pruitt-Igoe site and surroundings:
PARKS

2. St. Louis Place Park

Play areas
Softball fields
Basketball courts
"Drastically under-used"
-St. Louis City
Talk blog 2010



Spray and wading pool



Houses along the edge of St. Louis Place Park

3.



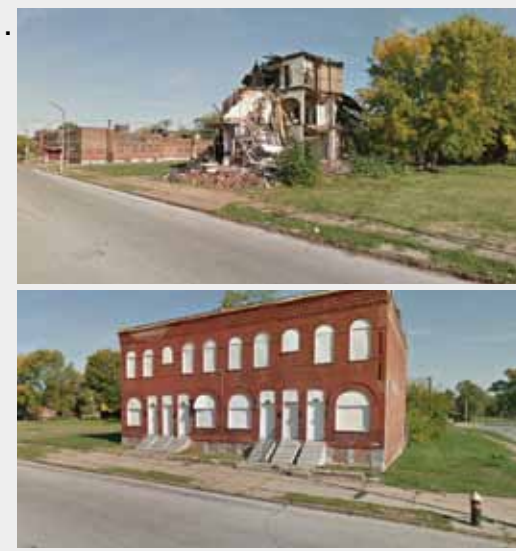
4. Murphy Park
Serves the surrounding Murphy Park apartments
Play areas

5. DeSoto Park

Remains since the
Pruitt-Igoe project
Soccer fields
Softball fields
Walking trails



1.



2. Disused factories



3. Abandonment along Cass Avenue



Above: Former Pruitt-Igoe
Neighborhood station in foreground



Pruitt-Igoe site and surroundings:
ABANDONED BUILDINGS
DISUSED LAND

Disused land



Abandoned buildings

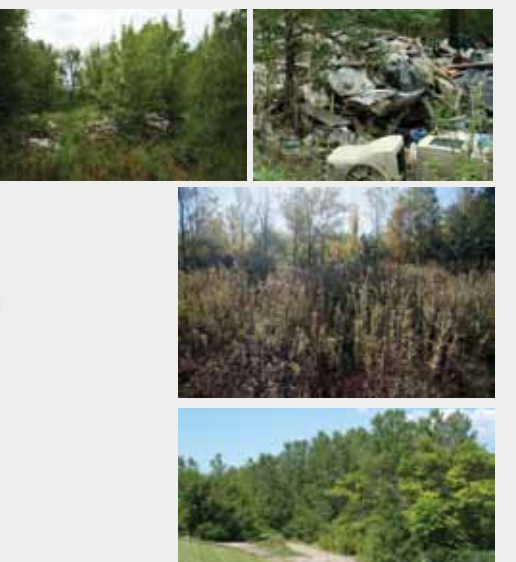


Empty lots

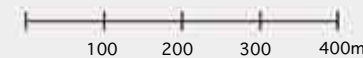
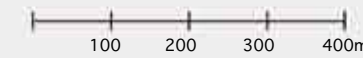


4. Pruitt-Igoe Forest

Partially fenced-in and overgrown part of
the former site of the Pruitt-Igoe project
Rubble



5. Former Pruitt School



1. Sullivan Place Apartments



2. Habitat for Humanity-sponsored housing



3. Occupied interspersed with abandoned houses



4.



Pruitt-Igoe site and surroundings: OCCUPIED DWELLINGS



5.



6. Falstaff Brewery Apartments



7. Residential area built in 2003



8. Murphy Park Apartments



9. Built on the former George L. Vaughn highrise site after their demolition in 2006. Townhouses and garden apartments.



1. Ricotta Heating & Air Conditioning

2. Ken's Refrigeration Equipment

3. Sentient Colors Inc.

4. JJS Flooring + Sentinel Newspapers

5. Garrison Health Center

6. St. Louis Carton

7. Furniture store

8. Former Jefferson Cass Health Center
Now: St. Louis Fire Department

Remains since the Pruitt-Igoe project



9. St. Louis Neighborhood Police Dpt.

10. St. Louis RV Park



Pruitt-Igoe site and surroundings: INDUSTRY AND WAREHOUSES OTHER SERVICES COMMERCE

Commerce

Services

Industry/Warehouse



11. Little Sisters of the Poor Rehabilitation Center Senior Apartments Nursing care

12. Griot Museum of Black History

13. Connector Castings + Absorene Sponge Manufacturing

14. Electric Substation

Remains in use since the Pruitt-Igoe project



15. Polish Heritage Center



Organizes parties, wine tastings etc. + annual Polish Festival

16. Motor Services, Car Centers, Junk Yards

17. Neighborhood Health Station

18. Warehouses

1. Columbia Elementary School
Ages 5-11
Around 250 students

2. Vashon High School
Ages 14-17, Around 750 students

3. Curtis Elementary School
Ages 5-11

4. Dunbar Elementary School
Ages 5-11
Around 400 students

5. Former Keller's Super-market
Now: Grace Baptist Church
Remains since the Pruitt-Igoe project

6. Gateway School Complex
Built in 1993.
Ages: 5-11
Around 500 students

7. Catholic St. Nicholas School and Church
Ages: 5-13
Around 300 students

8. Carr Lane VPA Middle School
Ages: 11-13
Around 550 students

9. Imagine College Prep High School
Ages: 14-17
Around 650 students

Pruitt-Igoe site and surroundings:
CHURCHES
SCHOOLS AND DAY CARE CENTERS

Schools and Daycare

Churches

10. "Like Our Own" Childcare Center
Ages: Infant - 5

11. Zion Lutheran Church

12. Grace Hill Head Start Day Care
Ages: 3 - 5

13. Little Treasures Day Care

14. Former Crunden Branch Library
Now: Church
Remains since the Pruitt-Igoe project

15. Blewett Middle School
Remains in use since the Pruitt-Igoe project
Ages: 11-13

16. St. Stanislaus Kotska Church
Catholic Church built in 1896.

17. Jefferson Elementary School
Ages 5-11
Around 250 students

RETHINKING WASTE
åsa berggren U+A/DL 2012/13

FURTHER ZOOMED-IN AREA

1. Residential Buildings



2. St. Bridget of Erin Roman Catholic Church and Central St Nicholas Catholic School and Academy



Built in 1860, St. Bridget of Erin Roman Catholic Church is one of the oldest churches in the city. It now serves the Central St. Nicholas Catholic School housed in a two story brick building dating to the 1950's that is adjacent to the church. Built as an Irish National Parish, it is a reminder of the Irish immigrants' influence on the area.

3. The Mullanphy Tenement



Built in 1909 as quality apartments for immigrants, the Mullanphy Tenement is abandoned but still standing.

Pruitt-Igoe site:
REMAINS FROM BEFORE PRUITT-IGOE

Built before Pruitt-Igoe



4. St. Stanislaus Kostka Church



Built in 1880 to serve the Polish community in St Louis, St. Stanislaus Kostka church is still in use.



Original sidewalk along Cass Ave.



1.Pruitt-Igoe Neighborhood Station

This now abandoned building was built in 1956 as Richardson's Delicatessen, and later served as the Neighborhood Station and Model Cities Office from 1966 through 1969. It operated as a center staffed with social workers and planners intent on fixing the social fabric of Pruitt-Igoe.



4.Former Keller's Supermarket

This one-story concrete block building was built as Keller's Supermarket in 1956. In 1971, Grace Baptist Church moved from an adjacent building into this one.



Pruitt-Igoe site: REMNANTS OF PRUITT-IGOE

Built during Pruitt-Igoe



2.Former Jefferson Cass Health Center



Now used by St. Louis Fire Department, this building served as a health center for the residents of Pruitt-Igoe.

3.Electric Substation



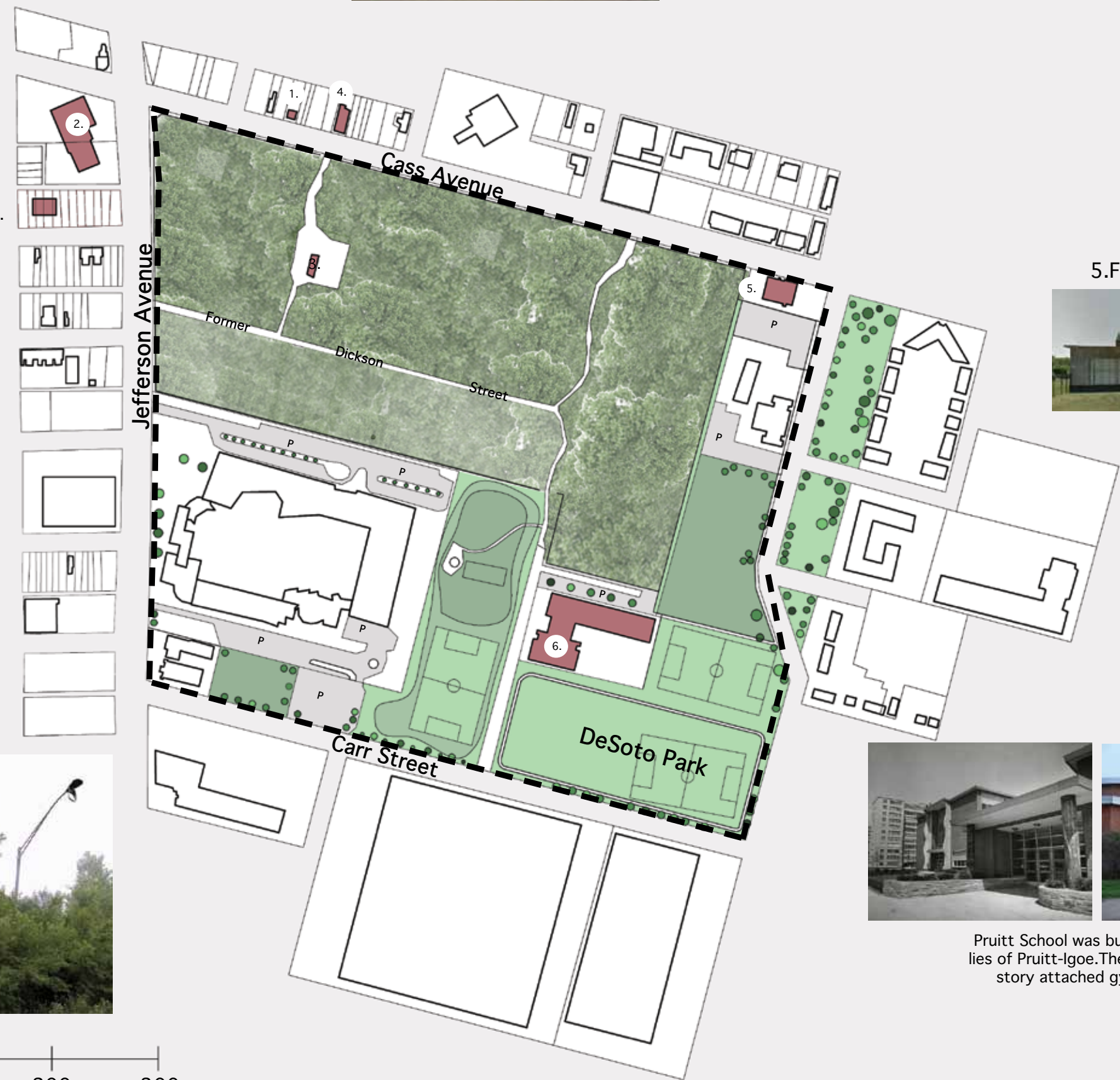
Designed by architects Hellmuth, Yamasaki and Leinweber, the electric substation was built as part of the Pruitt-Igoe project.

Fragments remaining

A lamppost, a metal post and several mahole covers remain from the Pruitt-Igoe period, as well as paving along the former Dickson street (right). Below: Original paving at Cass and Jefferson.



100 200 300m



5.Former Crunden Library



The former Crunden Branch Library, built in 1959 to serve Pruitt-Igoe. It is now used as a church.

6.Former Pruitt School



Pruitt School was built in 1955 to serve the families of Pruitt-Igoe. The two-story building with one-story attached gymnasium is currently vacant.

THE PRUITT-IGOE FOREST



Above: SOUTH ENTRANCE TO SITE



4.Gateway Schools Complex

The Gateway schools complex consists of three schools: Gateway Elementary School, Gateway Michael School, and Gateway Middle School, and the complex takes up 20 acres of the site. It is a school that specializes in maths, science and technology and has around 500 students.

5.Carr Lane Visual and Performative Arts Middle School

Carr Lane Visual and Performative Arts Middle School has around 550 students and has, apart from its focus on the arts, a number of special education services including programs for learning disabled, behavior disordered, speech and/or language impaired, physically handicapped and blind students.

100 200 300m



Pruitt-Igoe site: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Built after Pruitt-Igoe



1.Church



2.Polish Heritage Center



The Polish Heritage Center serves as a hireable venues and events space and the organization also arranges events for members as well as the public.

3.Jefferson Elementary School



Jefferson Elementary School has around 250 students and collaborates with an art organization to include dance- and art projects in the educational plan.

“[L]iving among ruins has its delights... It can be a wilderness more wild than any natural one, an alluring mix of freedom and danger. “

- Kevin Lynch, Wasting Away, 1990

That abandoned spaces inspire fascination, both through their aesthetics and the possibility of freedom and the hiding places they offer, is obvious. Wastespaces in fiction (and most likely in reality also) provide a place for young couples to go to finally be alone, for angry teenagers to ponder their problems in peace, for children to play games that parents and teachers would forbid if they knew about. They offer a safe haven for characters in dystopian tales of Big Brother states, and in detective stories they set the scene for violent crime and provide hiding places for hunted murderers. All these examples showcase the status of the wastespace as an extraordinary space, a space of *otherness*. As such, it does serve a purpose in the city and in the life of its citizens by providing the

alternative. In the words of Anna Jorgensen, editor of *Urban Wildscapes* (2011), these spaces may

“ (...) present the urban dweller with an alternative to the overly homogenous, mono-functional, sanitised and potentially excluding environments that are the mainstay of much contemporary urban development.”¹

Considering these characteristics of the urban wastespace, abandoned spaces in the city can be likened to so-called threshold spaces or liminal spaces. These terms have been used to describe spaces situated between two fixed states in cultural rites of passage, or, in architecture, two dissimilar spaces. The two concepts are not synonymous: while far from all threshold spaces can be described as wastespaces, wastespaces

¹ Jorgensen, 2011

can be considered to be a category within the concept of the threshold space.

Architect Herman Hertzberger describes the threshold space as follows:

“The child sitting on the step in front of his house is sufficiently aware from his mother to feel independent, to sense the excitement and adventure of the great unknown. Yet at the same time, sitting on the step, which is part of the street as well as of the home, he feels secure in the knowledge that his mother is nearby. The child feels at home and at the same time in the outside world.”²

While the urban wastespace does not serve the exact same function as the steps that separate the home from the outside world, the concept

² Hertzberger, 1991

can be applied to these spaces, too. The urban wastespace is wilderness within the city: a space between safety and danger, between city and nature, between the planned and the accidental, between the visible and the hidden. Just like the steps outside the child’s house allows him to taste the freedom of the outside world while at the same time remaining within reach of his mother, the urban wastespace gives whoever visits it a taste of chaos within the realm of the order of the city.

As a threshold space, the urban wastespace creates a possibility for a range of transgressive human activity. This is explored in the essay *Playing in Industrial Ruins*, written by Tim Edensor, Bethan Evan, Julian Holloway, Steve Millington and Jon Binnie. They describe the activities that can take place in these spaces – ranging from partying, sex and graffiti to parkour and joyriding- as situated ‘between play and work, and between those activities deemed ‘productive’ and ‘unproductive’ or ‘illicit’ and ‘legitimate’ These are activities often and easily discarded as ‘wasting time’. In *Playing in industrial ruins*, the authors explain:

“ Assertions that play is the antithesis of production, order and responsibility are analogous to the ways in which disordered spaces such as industrial ruins are similarly conceived as marginal, lacking purpose and wasteful; and they are

further typified as excessive, dangerous, and ‘out of place.’”³

However, the value of the opportunity to play in the way described in *Playing in Industrial Ruins* is not to be neglected. The authors go on to describe the problems of this ‘simplistic reasoning’⁴ by asserting that these spaces and the activities for which they set the scene are far from anti-productive or useless – or at least not objectively so. Just like the mention of waste should always prompt the question: *waste for whom?*, activities on the fringes of society, in between the illicit and the legitimate, should not be written off as useless before being more closely analysed. Explaining this by returning to the idea of the child in between the freedom and danger of the outside world and the safety of his mother, architect Wim Cuyvers writes:

³ Edensor et al. 2012 in Jorgensen, Keenan (ed.) p.73

⁴ Ibid.

”When a child wants to do something without its mother knowing, for instance, leaves the private space of the house. ... Such moments of transgression are, in my view, the most existential moments in life, the moments in which you get in touch with yourself. This is where I relate public space to the space of the ‘need’, the space where you go to do something that, despite all the rules of society, you cannot escape from and where you have to go for a moment.”

This is what Mick from *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* seeks, and finds, on the top of the not yet finished house in her neighborhood: an escape, a hole in her ordered and sometimes oppressive existence. In the essay *The Role of Wildscapes in Children’s Literature*⁵, author and artist Katy Mugford studies the function of

⁵ Mugford, 2012 in Jorgensen, Keenan (ed.)

wastespaces or wildscapes in children’s books. She finds that in the books she studied, wildscapes are used as ‘a vehicle for having adventures and learning through experience.’ She suggests that the opportunity to learn from the wildscape should not, and is not, reserved for fictional characters. She writes:

“ Climbing on rooftops and throwing mud is not the preserve of fiction. Creative learning can engage more than a school curriculum. Adventures are possible within the real world.”⁶

The wastespace provides a real life environment for potentially very valuable adventure. From being trusted to assess the risks of playing in these unorganized, potentially dangerous spaces, children can learn self-sufficiency and resourcefulness.

⁶ Ibid. p.94

The inclusiveness of wastespaces can also result in more concrete opportunities for more or less organized activity. In larger-scale wastespaces, it is often possible for artists and small organizations to find more or less ordered workspaces for little or next to no money. This is, for example, the case in the widely abandoned city of Detroit, where many artists are able to rent and buy large studio spaces very cheaply, resulting in a flourishing art scene in the city.⁷ This principle lays the ground for slow city development: as long as an area is considered a wastespace, economic forces usually pushing centrally situated land into more financially efficient or productive development are less likely to come into play. In *Field of Patience – Slow City – Real Estate Charts? Recurring Inspections of a Perforated Landscape* architect Wolfgang Kil writes about the situation in Leipzig, where the growing number of vacant spaces caused by the

⁷ PBS, 2012

demolition of buildings resulted in an alternative planning approach. A review process for East Leipzig from 2002 called centrally placed brownfields *field of patience* – areas for which there was no demand and therefore no realistic development plans. The strategy for these areas was ‘simply-wait and see!’⁸ This resulted in alternative possibilities; for example, landscape architects experimented with staking off horticultural ‘standby parcels’ strewn with crushed brick from the area’s demolished factories.⁹

Another important aspect of the urban wastespace, which sets it apart from being only a threshold space, is the aesthetics and symbolism of decay as well as the pure materiality of abandoned spaces. In *Playing in industrial ruins*, the authors mention as one of the reasons that these spaces lend themselves so well to

⁸ Kil, 2012, in Ziehl et.al (ed.), p.316

⁹ Ibid p.315

transgressive behaviour is the fact that in these contexts

“(...) the usual conventions about the inviolability of physical matter as property, commodity or other value-laden substance do not pertain, since the site and its contents have already been officially ascribed as worthless and obsolete.”¹⁰

These spaces are already considered waste, and therefore, destroying them further does not count as vandalism but is instead a safe way of exploring the pleasures of destruction.¹¹

The aspect of destruction and ruin also provides a materialistic alternative to the cleanliness and smoothness of the non-abandoned parts of the

¹⁰ Edensor et al. 2012 in Jorgensen, Keenan (ed.)p.67

¹¹ Ibid.

city. There are other sensual experiences to be found in urban wastespaces, other types of surfaces to touch, other smells, and other possibilities to physically explore the environment than there are in other parts of the urban environment.¹² In addition, they often provide space for nature to grow freely and animal life to exist in to an extent that is usually not possible within the city.

In addition to this, an abandoned space tells a story of what it was before its abandonment, as waste speaks of the product it once was and the lives in which it were consumed. In *Learning from Detroit or ‘the wrong kind of ruins’* Christopher Woodward writes that ‘a ruined structure compels the viewer to supply the missing pieces from their own imagination.’ Ruins are not subjectively beautiful or ugly, valuable or useless. Instead

¹² Ibid.



Graffiti in an abandoned space in Glasgow, Scotland. Photo: Rob Cartwright

they inspire a very personal and subjective response from their viewers. Woodward describes sociologist Alice Mah's argument that the way we see ruins is directly connected and determined by our distance from the event of its abandonment.¹³ This distance can be measured 'in terms of time, physical distance, or wealth.'¹⁴ If we are closely linked to a building or an area that is abandoned, we look at it differently than if we are outsiders, seeing the ruins without having seen the intact building it once was. This means that someone seeing the derelict areas of Detroit in a photograph might find the ruins beautiful and compelling, where as for the people who once lived there it is only a picture of the garbage their former residence has become. This also applies in a wider and more general sense. Depending on a society's

relation to a specific area, the memories and remains of the buildings that once stood on a site can give an added value and a positive significance to an urban wastespace in the view of society as a whole. In the same way, they can traumatize it. In either case, the memories and significance of the ruins can make decisions of renewed construction on the site problematic and time-consuming, causing (or allowing) the wastespace to be long-lived. For example, Ground Zero in downtown New York, the scene of an event that most people – and in particular those closely linked to the area – consider to be deeply tragic, is an urban wastespace filled with traumatic memories. This makes the process and planning of new construction on the site problematic and symbolically significant, to a much larger extent than is usually the case in a space where a building has merely been deliberately demolished.

¹³ Woodward, 2012 in Jorgensen, Keenan (ed.) p.24

¹⁴ Ibid.



When something has occurred in a space which is generally considered to have traumatized it, it may be preferable to start over, using what Catherine Heatherington describes in her essay *Buried Narratives* (2011)¹⁵ as the ‘demolish, dig and design’ approach. Even in less dramatic cases, the case can be argued to apply so called ‘prescriptive forgetting’¹⁶ – a decision to ‘erase’ the physical remains of the past and start over. However, in many cases, this can result in a sense of loss and disconnection for people closely related to the space and its history. The wastespace offers a valuable glimpse into the history of a space, which means it is not a blank canvas – it provides a set of specific possibilities from which a future can be built.

¹⁵ Heatherington 2011 in Jorgensen, Keenan (ed.)

¹⁶ Connerton, 2008

“My goal is to take the history of Pruitt-Igoe which is taboo, which is a blemish, which is the worst disaster ever, and say OK, **yes that did happen**, but there’s **so much energy, so much interest** in Pruitt-Igoe. Not only through art and through architecture, but through social workers... It’s a very interdisciplinary, rich subject. And so if all that energy is going there, if you just **switch the current and have it go the other way, taking one of the worst examples of public housing and transforming it to one of the leading examples of renewal, that is pretty powerful**. This place has incredible, amazing potential that could be a doorway, a symbol for North St. Louis, saying: **it’s not all bad.**”

- Juan William Chávez, artist and founder of the Northside Workshop



Lesson in community gardening at the Northside Workshop. Photo: Kim Wardenburg

“ *The next time the city changes – remember Pruitt-Igoe.*”

- Chad Freidrichs, *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth*, 2011

Looking at it as waste, it is not difficult to understand why the site left behind after the destruction of Pruitt-Igoe is seen as ‘a problem without a clear solution, best left unmentioned’.¹ But the same characteristics that define the area as waste to some also makes it a dead zone and a threshold space, a scene for alternative possibilities and inverted rules. It is obviously a space of beautiful and flourishing nature. It is also a space laden with memories, heavy with blame of real and supposed failure.

Some will argue that the Pruitt-Igoe project failed because it became regarded as a waste project for waste people. Money would not be

¹ Competition Brief, 2011, *pruittigoenow.org*

invested in maintaining the buildings because it was not prioritized, and in the end, when the area was out of the control of the city, it was demolished instead of salvaged. The destruction of the buildings was the disposing of garbage – the area had been reduced to the status of waste years before the demolition, and it has kept this status ever since. The area is, for these reasons, traumatized by its past, and regarded by the majority of people as the shameful reminder of a failed project. Michael R. Allen writes in an article from October 2011:

*“Through avoidance, Pruitt-Igoe’s forest has become the secret heart of the city. While the Gateway Arch beats the pulse of a proud city, Pruitt-Igoe murmurs its shame.”*²

² Allen, 2011

However, as Chad Freidrich’s documentary *The Pruitt Igoe Myth* reveals, there are people who look at the area as it is now and remember moving in to a new, shiny apartment, or playing in the green spaces outside, or simply having a home. To these people, the Pruitt-Igoe forest is a place of *positive* memories and significance.

In addition, the notoriety of the project makes the site the subject of international interest. Juan William Chávez, St. Louis-based artist and founder of the Northside Workshop, recalls that when he opened Boots Contemporary Art Space for young artists in St. Louis, he would receive international calls at least once a month from students of architecture, design or sociology, asking about possibilities to come and study the Pruitt-Igoe site and its history.¹ The widespread interest in the site is also proved by the fact that the Pruitt Igoe Now Design Competition had

¹ Chávez, Interview 2013-04-14

over 300 entrants from all over the world, which according to Michael R. Allen was a much higher number than the organizers had anticipated.²

The Pruitt-Igoe forest, although rarely visited and fenced in on all sides, is a space of undeniable beauty. It provides a rare opportunity for experiencing wild nature within the boundaries of the city, as well as a home to birds, hares and bees. The density and unruliness of the vegetation make it an ideal place for exploration and it is not difficult to imagine the various thrown away objects and rubble dumped throughout the site as playthings or building elements.

Whatever the truth is about the Pruitt-Igoe project, both the remaining community and Nature have created a new reality for what was left after its destruction. Decay and

² Allen, Interview 2013-04-11



abandonment are strong presences both on and around the site, but at the same time, a buzzing of life and activity forms a widespread net stretching over the homes left behind, the crumbling brick facades and the abundance of vacant lots. Apart from the thriving forest, there are numerous inhabited homes, active schools and churches, as well as several organizations working to stage small-scale interventions, organize activities and connect the local community. Perhaps no urban rebirth has officially arrived, but the area is clearly not dying.

6. Design Approaches

Although wastespaces can serve as an alternative to more traditional and planned urban spaces, their presence in the city is not unproblematic. The element of risk that often accompanies the urban wastespace, while perhaps tickling and sometimes valuable, in certain cases mean that a space needs to be removed or redesigned. Other practical considerations, such as economical factors, can also make the preservation of an urban wastespace impossible. Exploring the merits of wastespaces should not, either, pass over the line to romanticizing the aesthetics or ‘authenticity’ of these spaces, nor become overly nostalgic in relation to a past that is always ambiguous. Transgressive human behaviour does not take place exclusively in these spaces, and not all activity that does take place within them is positive or useful. In other words, while it might be of value to leave certain urban wastespaces untouched, it is not desirable, nor possible, to do so with all of them. There is, therefore, a need for

approaches within architecture and urban planning towards *redesigning* existing urban wastespaces, without removing their positive aspects, as well as *designing* new spaces that incorporate these same merits.

Starting from the discussed definition and merits of waste and wastespaces, several categories of design approaches that aim to retain these merits in redesigned wastespaces, as well as create them in new public space, can be distinguished. This thesis aims to go through a small range of references, exemplifying these different design approaches. Although many of the references serve as examples of more than one approach, they are, for the purpose of this thesis, categorized under three headlines: *place*, *time* and *ownership*. Each category poses a different question to be answered in relation to a site about to be developed or redeveloped. If all these questions are taken into consideration during the design process for public space, it could lay the ground for the design of more inclusive, flexible and alternative public space.

PLACE

The category of *place* relates to the physical condition and placement of the wastespace. These forgotten spaces and the discarded materials they often contain – rubble, ruins, trash – are regarded as waste, but waste for whom? The references in this category concern putting wastespaces and waste objects into a new context, thus altering the way we view them.

6.1.1 Context

As discussed earlier, nothing is *intrinsically* waste. Instead, the spaces and objects that are considered trash are no longer fit for their intended use – they are matter out of place. When analysing a wastespace that is to be redeveloped, the question of how this space came to be considered waste, and how that view can be reversed, goes hand in hand with understanding its *context*.

HOW CAN ALTERING THE CONTEXT OF THE SITE CHANGE ITS VALUE?

Like Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* proves, altering the context of an object can transform the way we view it completely. Basurama, a ‘forum for discussion and reflection on trash, waste and reuse’¹ based in Madrid, have experimented with this concept in all of their work. Basurama was started in the Madrid School of Architecture in 2001, and has staged a wide range of both small and medium scale interventions, projects and installations, all involving the idea of waste and how we see it. On their website, they write:

“Far from trying to offer a single manifest to be used as a manual, Basurama has compiled a series of multiform opinions and projects, not necessarily resembling each other, which explore different areas. We try to establish subtle connections between them so that they may give rise to unexpected reactions. We are not worried

about its lack of unity; moreover, we believe it to be evocative and potentially subversive.”

One of their installations, *You Are What You Throw*, consisted of a 10x5m scaffolding structure placed on the grounds of the International Benicassim Festival in Spain from in July of 2007. During the course of the festival, the structure was gradually filled with the garbage generated by the festivalgoers. Even though the installation did not give the trash a new, practical use, nor transform it into something particularly beautiful, it put garbage into a new context and therefore made people look at it differently.

An example on a much larger scale is multi-disciplinary design practice Urban-Think Tank’s *Metrocable Project* in Caracas, Venezuela, one of eleven projects shown at MoMA New York’s exhibition “Small Scale, Big Change – New Architectures of Social Engagement” (October 3, 2010–January 3, 2011). In Caracas, hills surround

¹ Basurama website, 2013 basurama.org



Urban-Think Tank's Caracas cable-car line.
Image: Iwan Baan

the city center. These hills are the sites of favelas, slum-like areas largely populated by poor, rural migrants. Even though an estimated 60% of the five million inhabitants of Caracas live in areas like these, they have not been connected to public transport due to their illegal status.¹ Architects Alfredo Brillembourg and Hubert Klumpner, partners of Urban-Think Tank, proposed the construction of a cable-car system to link two of the favelas to Caracas's public transport system. By using a cable-car system instead of roads to connect the favelas to the city center, almost no dwellings in the favelas would have to be torn down in order to carry out the development. One of the project's proposed cable-car lines was opened in 2010 and has 5 stations. The exhibition information from MoMA New York states that:

"Some elements of the highly politicized project have been altered or not yet realized,

¹ MoMA NY, 2010 moma.org 2013-05-20

but the project will continue to contribute to gradual changes in Caracas's social structure; Urban-Think Tank has set a new precedent for development in the informal city."

By surveying the site, organizing community workshops and doing on-the-ground fieldwork, Urban-Think Tank developed a proposal that would promote and benefit the favelas as they are, minimally impacting them while changing their context by improving their connection to the city center. The positive effects of the development are already visible in San Agustín, the favela connected to the city by the finished cable-car line. In an online article entitled *Over Site: how Caracas's new cable-car system is making the city's favelas more visible*, the interviewed Brillembourg states:

"Residents have begun to use the station roofs for advertising their businesses, and crime rates have dropped because criminals

fear they'll be seen from the gondolas. For Urban Think Tank, we view the cable car not as a solution for all the problems these communities are facing, but as the base for the solution – an infrastructure for social change.”¹

Examples from St. Louis

In 2010, St. Louis-based artist and cultural activist Juan William Chávez developed the *Pruitt-Igoe Bee Sanctuary* proposal for the former Pruitt-Igoe site. He writes of his first visit to the forest:

“In the spring of 2010 I entered this forest expecting the remains of a community but was surprised to see the beginning of another. What was once an unnatural environment for

¹ Sokol, 2010 architonic.com 2013-05-20

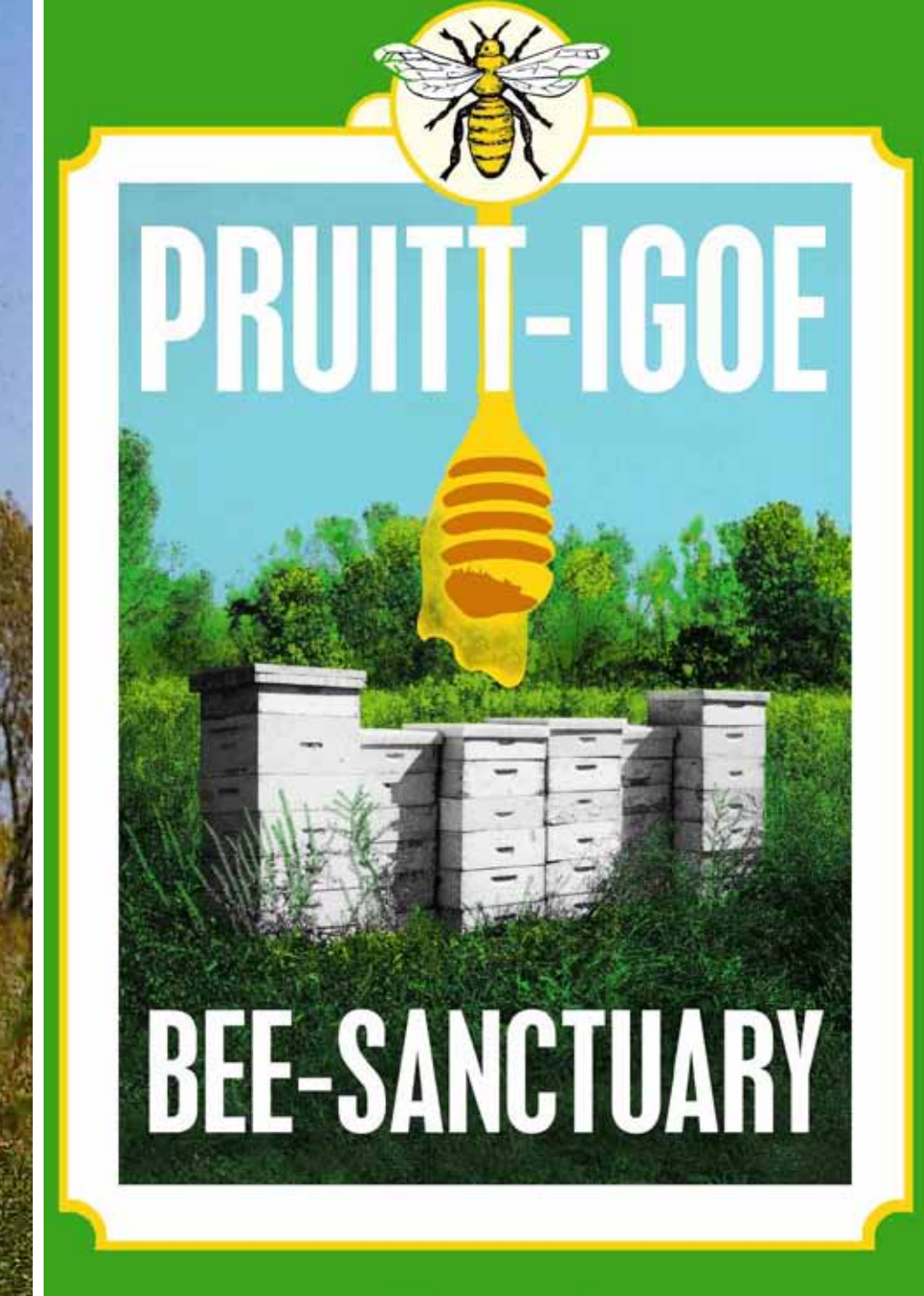
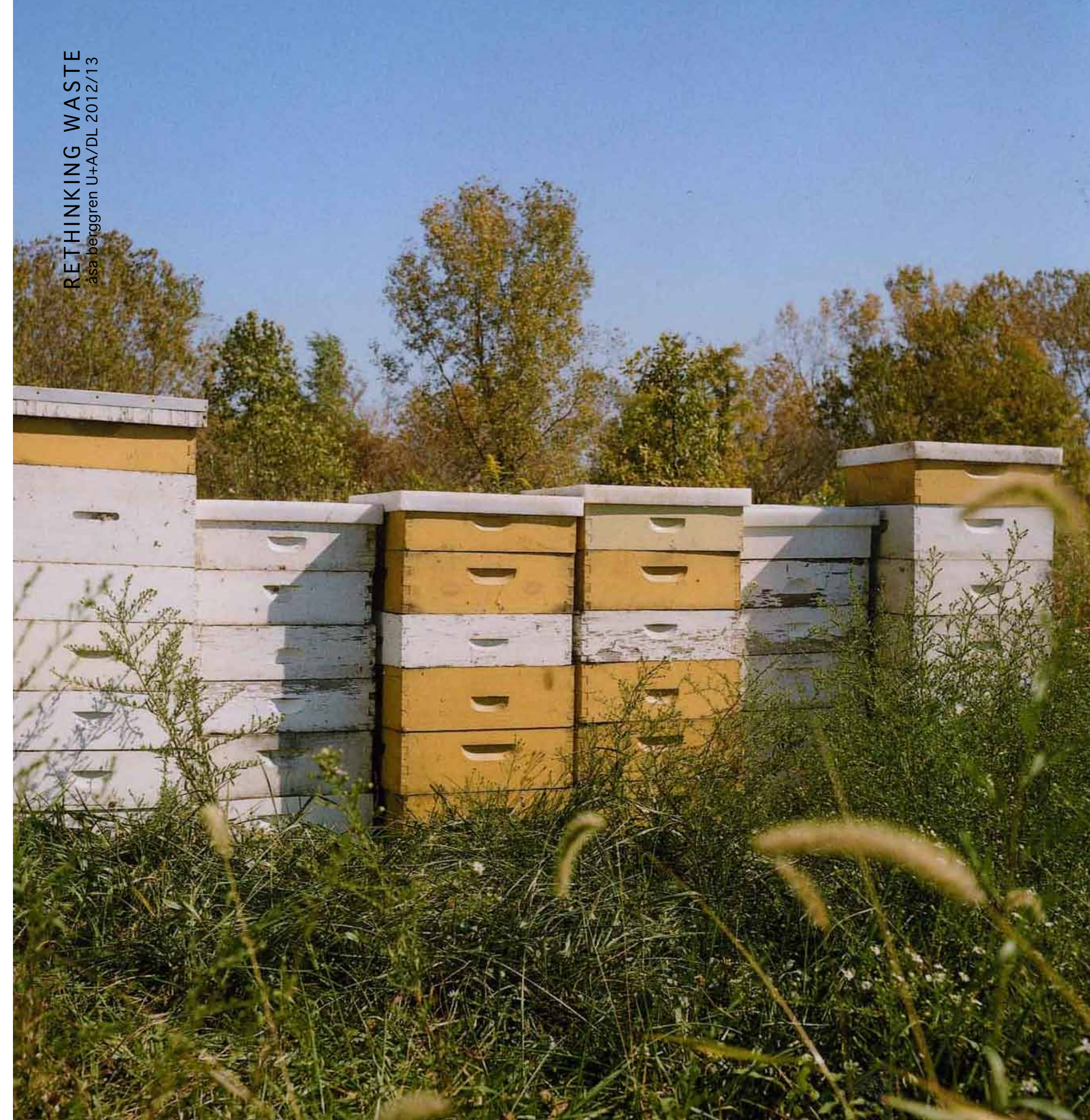
one had become a natural habitat for another. I saw bees.”

The project is a ‘living’ proposal, continually in development, and is intended to spark a discussion rather than give a definitive answer on what the site should become. Chávez proposes to transform the site into a public space that

“cultivates community through education and urban agriculture. Drawing parallels to the depleting population of bees and shrinking cities, this interdisciplinary project-in-progress has the unique opportunity to reignite the conversation about urban abandonment and creative strategies for addressing it.”²

By seeing the possible birth of a new community rather than the death of an old one, Chávez’s proposal reverses our view of the abandoned space

² pruit-igoebesanctuary.com, 2013-05-20



Above: Promotional poster for the Pruitt-Igoe Bee Sanctuary, inspired by the graphics of the promotional material for the slum removal of which the Pruitt-Igoe project was a part.

Left: Juan William Chávez -Art installation - beehives arranged in the shape of one of the Pruitt-Igoe buildings.

Images: Juan William Chávez

that is the Pruitt-Igoe site and highlights its unique possibilities.

In April 2013, the winners of the *Sustainable Land Lab Competition*, hosted by the Office of Sustainability at the Washington University in St. Louis, were announced. The teams had been asked to propose ‘innovative projects that transform vacant lots into assets that advance sustainability.’¹ The winning teams then received 5000USD in funding and a two year-lease of their chosen vacant lot in order to be able to implement their projects. The vacant lots were all situated in the Old North St. Louis neighborhood, around a kilometre away from the former Pruitt-Igoe site. The competition brief states that

“ Winning teams will implement and maintain their projects as living laboratories, teaching

¹ Sustainable Land Lab Competition, 2013

tools, and regional sustainability assets for two years.”

The finalist proposals included urban agriculture projects, a restaurant built out of old shipping containers and a chess park; all small-scale, relatively low-cost projects that will turn their chosen vacant lot into something alive, while at the same time showcasing the potential of other urban lots still left empty.

As well as altering the context - and thereby the view - of the space itself, putting the materials found on the site to new use is a concept relating to *place*.

WHICH MATERIALS EXIST ON THE SITE THAT MIGHT BE USEFUL?

There are endless small-scale examples of upcycling, downcycling and recycling of materials, both inside and outside of the sphere of architecture and urban design. Still, only a tiny percentage of our trash and waste materials are recycled. Architect Alejandro Bahamón writes in the foreword to the book *Rematerial: From Waste to Architecture*, of which he is one of the authors, that even though the notion of environmental issues and sustainability has become fashionable,

“It should be pointed out (...) that the very idea of manipulating garbage – and moreover using ingenuity to turn it into something productive and beautiful – is extremely innovative and virtually contravenes social convention.”¹

¹ Bahamón, Sanjines, 2010

The earlier mentioned discussion forum Basurama has carried out several such innovative initiatives. Within the project *USW Niamey: Let's do it Together!*, in which they participated, a playground was built by the local community in Niamey on a site where the Ghanda Cultural Center's trash used to be burnt. The 8-day workshop was part of an educational training project held by 60 volunteers from 12 cultural centers. Materials used for the playgrounds were pallets, tires, garbage bags and jerry cans, all of which can be easily found at any of Niamey's many fleamarkets.¹ By using local waste materials and simple techniques, the project shows the possibilities of reusing even small trash objects we would normally not hesitate to throw away.

In *Rematerial: From Waste to Architecture*, a similar project, *Millegomme Cascoland*, is presented. It is both a social and an architectural project, carried out in 2006 by the design laboratory DEFUNC.

¹ Basurama (2011), basurama.org

Invited to a multidisciplinary, multicultural festival called Cascoland in Cape Town, South Africa, DEFUNC started working in a suburb to the city. The inhabitants of the suburb were mostly living off collecting scrap metal and other waste materials and selling it to recyclers. The architects started paying small sums of money to school children to collect discarded car tires on their way home from school, out of which they then created a play area and small refuges from wind and rain. They also opened a workshop where they built chairs, benches and games, all out of the thrown-away tires. When the architects left the suburb, they left behind their tools, allowing for the inhabitants to keep building with the discarded tires.

Both these projects look at a specific situation, and a specific place, to find overlooked material possibilities for growth, both physical and social.



Parts of the playground designed during the USW Niamey initiative.
 Image: Basuramas

TIME

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images [...]

- T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) The Waste Land, The Burial of the dead 19-22

The concept of waste is intrinsically linked to the passing of *time*. Wastespaces tell the story of their pasts, but they are also continually changing, whether it is through the decay of buildings or the growth of new vegetation. The references in this category deal with giving a site a future without rupturing its timeline.

6.2.1 Memory/ Narrative

Retaining the history of a site requires understanding it and, to some extent, organising and directing a narrative from the fragments left behind. However, the story a place tells of its past is always dependant on the person who seeks it, and therefore always ambiguous.

WHOSE/WHAT STORY SHOULD BE TOLD?

Because of the ambiguity of the past, some attempts to create monuments or symbols of the history of a space risk being too static or objective. When we pick up an old brick from a disused factory, we may remember a million things: memories from our own pasts, the past of the city, something we saw in a film or read in a book. When these natural remains of a place and a period of time is replaced by a sculpture, for example, using industrial-like materials, we are instead being fed a memory: the memory of the industry that once stood there. At the same time, sometimes the layers of the traces present in a space may need to be deciphered and revealed by subtle intervention. Catherine Heatherington exemplifies this approach of creating or revealing a narrative within a space in her essay *Buried Narratives*¹. She describes the small derelict space of *Rainham Marshes*, situated in between the Eurostar railway and the River Thames in England. The space used to be a firing range for military use,

but has now been transformed into a bird reserve. The traces and ruins of the surrounding environment are left as they are, and a discreet boardwalk steers the visitor around the area. Information boards explaining the different remains are provided. Heatherington writes:

“ with trains speeding past every few minutes and pylons, chimneys and wind turbines on the horizon, the visitor cannot help but be aware of the relationship between past, present and future in this site.”

However, with this approach of reframing, revealing or providing a narrative, there is always the question of *whose* narrative that is. This speaks for the involvement of people closely and personally linked to the site, as their narrative may be considered

¹ In Jorgensen, Keenan (2012) p.171

more relevant than that of a designer from the outside (although not more objectively true).¹

The history and memory of a space are not definitive or constant. Whether we interfere or not with a space, its history moves forward and new memories and layers are created. Clarifying or accentuating this process may be a non-intrusive way of maintaining an urban wasteland. For example, strategically using spontaneous vegetation as a basis for new planting design within an urban wasteland may make it, as Heatherington puts it, possible to keep ‘the decaying of the industrial ruins gradually running hand in hand with the process of enhanced succession’.² In 2012, the Belgian architecture firm Rotor Architects made an intervention in the *Grindbakken*: a 160 meter long structure, formerly used to transfer gravel and sand

¹ Design approaches concerning co-creation and co-owning of a space by the people closest to it are further studied under the *ownership* category.

² Heatherington in Jorgensen, Keenan (ed.) 2011

between ships and trucks, situated on the docks of Ghent, Belgium. The project consisted of making the structure a public space, open 24/7 and supplied with water and electricity. The inside of the structure was then painted white ‘as an empty canvas for future activities’.³ During the painting work, 36 ‘frames’ were selected, and these areas were left bare and free of white paint. This way, specific areas of interest – such as pieces of graffiti artwork or beautiful vegetation – were both protected from being demolished by the intervention and showcased to the site’s future visitors. This is an example of how to, in a simple way, direct a narrative out of the processes and features already existing on a site, thus making the space seem less conclusively moving in the direction of death.

The realisation of the winning proposal for *Fresh Kills Park* on Staten Island, New York began in October 2008 and will be continuing in phases for the next

³ Rotor Architects website, rotordb.org 2013-05-21



Rotor Architects’ public space Grindbakken in Ghent, Belgium.
 Images: Rotor Architects

thirty years. The proposal was designed by landscape architects Field Operations. Staten Island Borough President James P Molinaro writes in the Draft Master Plan from 2006:

“To paraphrase a famous playwright, an exit door is also the entrance into a new space, and this Master Plan is the sound of the exit door closing, leaving behind the Fresh Kills of yesterday. “

However, Fresh Kills is not ready to close the door to its past quite yet. Field Operations have divided the development of the plan into four rough phases that together make up what they call a ‘Lifescape’: first comes Moundscape, during which the garbage of the landfill is still compacting, the fluids and gasses are still being processed, and the garbage mounds are still being covered up. During this stage, only a part of the park will be open to visitors. Journalist Robert Sullivan writes in an article about

the development of the site that during the Moundscape period ‘a visit will be like going for a walk in the country, except the hills will be garbage hills’¹. During the three later stages – Fieldscape, Openscape and Eventscape – the garbage mounds are slowly being covered and planted with new vegetation. The mound of rubble from the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in 2001 will be left in a separate part of Fresh Kills Park. On top of this mound ‘an enormous earthwork monument is envisioned (...) the same size and scale of the original twin towers.’² This mound, as well as the others, will offer the visitors spectacular views, some over Manhattan. When fully developed, Fresh Kills Park will no longer be a ‘steaming, stinking, seagull-infested mountain of trash’³, but the history of the site and the tons of garbage it consists of are literally shaping its landscape.

¹ Sullivan, 2008

² City of New York, 2006 Draft Master Plan: Fresh Kills Parks

³ Sullivan, 2008

OWNERSHIP

Another important aspect to consider is how to retain or create the intrinsic inclusiveness of a space that is considered useless. The category of *ownership* references projects that are co-created and co-owned, allowing for activities sometimes banned from public space.

WHO DOES/SHOULD THE SITE BELONG TO?

As earlier discussed, the quality that makes a space a threshold space, or a dead zone, allows it to offer other possibilities for human activity than most other spaces in the city. In order to retain or create the quality of flexibility or uncertainty that these spaces possess, one design approach may be to focus on the process of change rather than the finished product that change creates. Within this approach, a designer can create landscapes that are continually changing, or make the change that is already occurring on a site more visible.¹ For example, by avoiding completed or permanent architecture, it may be possible to retain the quality of spontaneity within a redesigned urban wastespace. Instead, mobile, temporary and flexible installations can improve the space, ideally without introducing expectations or restrictions to its visitors.² This is exemplified in

¹ Heatherington, 2011 in Jorgensen, Keenan (ed.)

² Sheridan, 2011 in Jorgensen, Keenan (ed.)

a project described in Dougal Sheridan's essay *Disordering Public Space*¹. The project he presents, proposed by his own architectural firm, LiD Architects, is situated on an abandoned site in the *Dublin Docklands* area, and consists of stacked shipping containers, evoking the 'derelict pile of containers in the adjacent port'. The containers are all equipped with running water and electricity, and can be used for any number of activities, both commercial and otherwise. The structure these easily rearranged and re-appropriated units form is a permeable square, defining a central space in its midst. The area is also meant to be a space for performative activities such as concerts, cinema, and markets. All these activities are intended to be free of charge. Sheridan writes of the project:

"Ruin-like registration of change, use of temporary programmes and structures, an

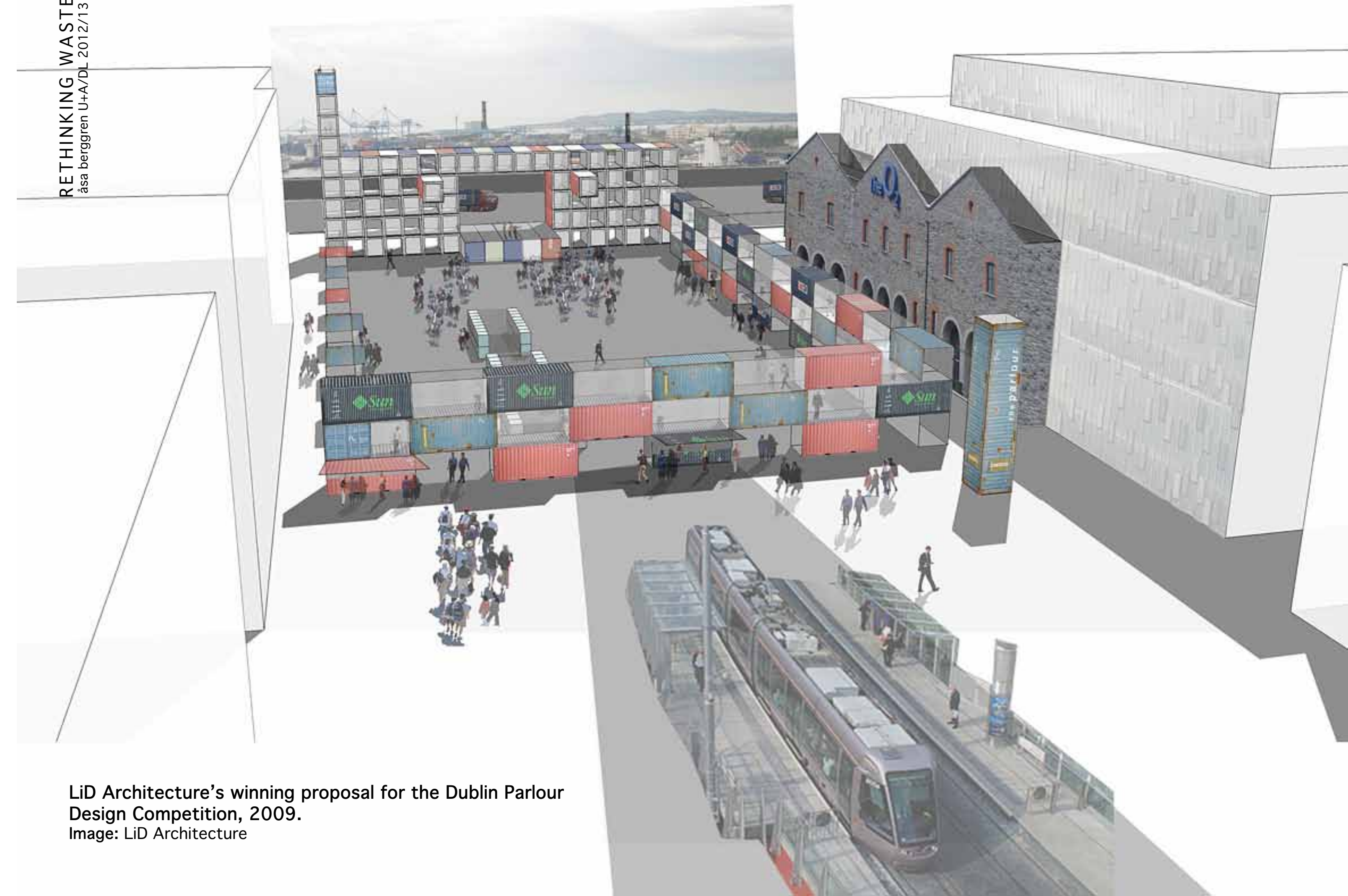
¹ In Jorgensen, Keenan (ed.), 2011

*emphasis on flexibility, adaptability and performative qualities, and an open-ended indeterminate attitude to the programmatic functioning of the space, allowing its appropriation to grow and evolve organically over time, are all traits and attributes informed by urban wildscapes."*²

In this example, the visitor is invited to be a co-creator of the project, albeit within certain set rules. The rough materials of the project also allow for aesthetic contribution, such as graffiti, retaining the possibility for a certain level of 'destruction' that is usually not a component in more rigidly ordered urban spaces.

To successfully redesign a space within which transgressive activity already takes place, the designer may need to be aware of what these activities are. Dougal Sheridan describes the roles in

² Sheridan, 2011, in Jorgensen, Keenan (ed.) p.217



LiD Architecture's winning proposal for the Dublin Parlour Design Competition, 2009.
Image: LiD Architecture

these kind of processes as preferably blurred, so that the role of ‘designer, user, developer, environmentalist, builder, business person overlap or converge’.¹ When aware of the use of the space, facilitating the activities carried out within it can be part of the new design of the site,² and the editing and removal of elements can be done while taking these activities into consideration and possibly reducing the danger of practicing them. Involving future and present users of the site in the design process can also have other positive effects. Returning to St. Louis, we take a look at the examples of initiatives of co-creation concerning the Northern parts of the city.

Examples from St. Louis

The third-prize winner of the Pruitt Igoe Now Design Competition, entitled *The Fantastic Pruitt Igoe!*, was

¹ Ibid. p.218

² Heatherington, 2011 in Jorgensen, Keenan (ed.)

developed by urban planning and design collaborative Social Agency Lab. Founded in 2011, Social Agency Lab consists of urban planners, designers and artist, and aims to ‘place social considerations at the forefront of designing urban space’.³ The collective has members throughout the US and arrange a twice-yearly participatory workshop to present current work and provide technical support to community organizations in the host city of the workshop. In a paper written and presented at 2012 American Anthropological Association conference, Social Agency Lab collaborators Maria Lucia Vidart and Zakcq Lockrem write:

“Social Agency Lab understands urban design to be a social process with a spatial outcome, while its implementation is a spatial process with a social outcome. In this sense, we believe the process of design is critical to

³ Lockrem, Vidart, 2012

include and empower all potential inhabitants of space (intended and unintended dwellers), and therefore we engage resident communities in all phases of the design process. By reflecting the diversity of the people who inhabit space in our design practice, we support richer, more unique urban spaces. (...) Social Agency Lab’s approach to cities and populations is not one of intervention but one of imagination and possibility. This approach has produced a design practice that does not focus only on the end product and its use, but rather focuses on urban design and space making as a live process in constant transformation; just as biological and social bodies are constantly in flux. We believe space is constituted through changing processes, and therefore we think of space and place as flexible. “

This way of thinking is implemented in the winning

proposal the Agency submitted to the Pruitt Igoe Now Competition. It was carried out in collaboration with the Rebuild Foundation, a non-profit organization focusing on ‘cultural and economic redevelopment and affordable space initiatives in under-resourced communities’ based in the Hyde Park neighborhood in St. Louis.

To provide a ground for the proposal, Social Agency Lab carried out a one-day workshop with the youths collaborating with the Rebuild Foundation. Together, they visited the Pruitt-Igoe site. There, the youths ‘envisioned possible futures for the city’, making the Pruitt-Igoe site ‘a blank canvas for drafting these ideas.’¹ They also wrote letters imagining Pruitt-Igoe in the future, as well as built models of their visions. The resulting proposal was not an architectural design but an

“iterative process process for the site,

¹ Lockrem, Vidart, 2012

transforming it from an unoccupied void in the urban fabric to a space of empowerment that would allow young St. Louisians the opportunity to imagine, build and govern public space.”¹

This process will, in the vision of Social Agency Lab, be a modern day commons, full of temporary activities and programmes, constantly changing according to the needs and wants of the youths in the area.

Another initiative involving North St. Louis youths is the *Sweet Potato Project*, managed by the former Pruitt-Igoe resident, journalist and public speaker Sylvester Brown Jr. The project is a collaboration between the North Area Community Development Corporation and the local nonprofit organization When We Dream Together, Inc. The Sweet Potato project aims to offer educational and money-making

¹ Lockrem, Vidart, 2012

opportunities for “at-risk” youth in St. Louis, as well as bring ‘economic activity back to long-neglected urban areas by creating alternative and progressive ways to create and distribute products that are grown and created within these disadvantaged communities.’² More specifically, it provides a 9-week summer program for 10-20 youth, paying them a small wage to undergo business training, take classes on leadership, teamwork, website design and product development as well as plant sweet potatoes on vacant lots in North St. Louis, harvest them, produce products such as Sweet potato cookies, and finally market, sell and distribute them. The initiators of the projects state:

“With this endeavor and a cadre of supporters, youth will learn that there are

² The Sweet Potato Project website, sweetpotatoprojectstl.org 2013-05-21

indeed money-making, self-sustaining opportunities in their own neighborhoods.”¹

Although the Sweet Potato project is not technically a design proposal for vacant areas in St. Louis, the programmes it proposes are potentially beneficial spatially for these areas. If vacant lots are dedicated to the growing of sweet potatoes within the frame of this program, that could give a sense of ownership and responsibility for these spaces to the people living in the area.

The earlier mentioned artist Juan William Chávez is the founder of the *Northside Workshop*, located around a kilometre away from the former Pruitt-Igoe site. The workshop is a ‘non-profit art space dedicated to addressing cultural and community issues in North Saint Louis,’² and has its centre in a restored brick building in the neighborhood of Old

¹ The Sweet Potato Project website, sweetpotatoprojectstl.org 2013-05-21

² juanwilliamchavez.com, 2013-05-03

North St. Louis. In the garden there are beehives and a small planting area, serving as a space for outdoor workshops and classes for local youths. The workshop also organizes discussions about subjects such as racial division in St. Louis as well as the idea of co-responsibility, and co-owning and beautifying the local area. The Northside workshop has also organized activities to reclaim the abandoned areas, such as clean-ups of the Pruitt-Igoe Forest, during one of which a sign was put up on the fence surrounding the forest, reading: ‘Pruitt-Igoe Public Space’.

In the same neighborhood, the *Old North St. Louis Restoration Group* has its headquarters. The group is a community-based, non-profit organization established in 1981 by the residents of the Old North St. Louis neighborhood. The aim of the initiative was to ‘revitalize the physical and social dimensions of the community in a manner that



Left and top: The Northside Workshop garden.
Photos by author

Above: Northside W. building before and after the restoration.
Photo NSW 2012

respects its historic, cultural and urban character.’¹ Their projects include the rehabilitation of historic buildings in the neighborhood, development of new homes, preserving endangered historic buildings and organizing volunteer clean-ups of vacant lots. They have also established a Grocery co-op and arrange a weekly farmer’s market. Director of ONSLRG, Sean Thomas, says of the group’s development initiatives in the area:

“ We, as a non-profit, were building (new homes) because nobody else was coming forward to do that. The ideal scenario would be if we could start doing something like that and others would see an opportunity. That’s really what our job is, to be a catalyst or a stimulator of demand for new housing.”²

¹ Old North St. Louis Restoration Group Website, onsl.org
2013-04-03

² Interview Thomas, 2013-04-15

All these examples are multi-disciplinary projects, where decisions are not made solely by architects, urban planners or designers, but instead co-created and involving parts of the local community. This results in more gradual, process-like development, and ultimately more inclusive public space.

Taking all these questions and approaches into consideration, what future can be imagined for Pruitt-Igoe?



Part of the redeveloped North 14th Street.
Buildings restored by the Old North St. Louis Restoration Group.
Photo by author

METHOD AND RESERVATIONS

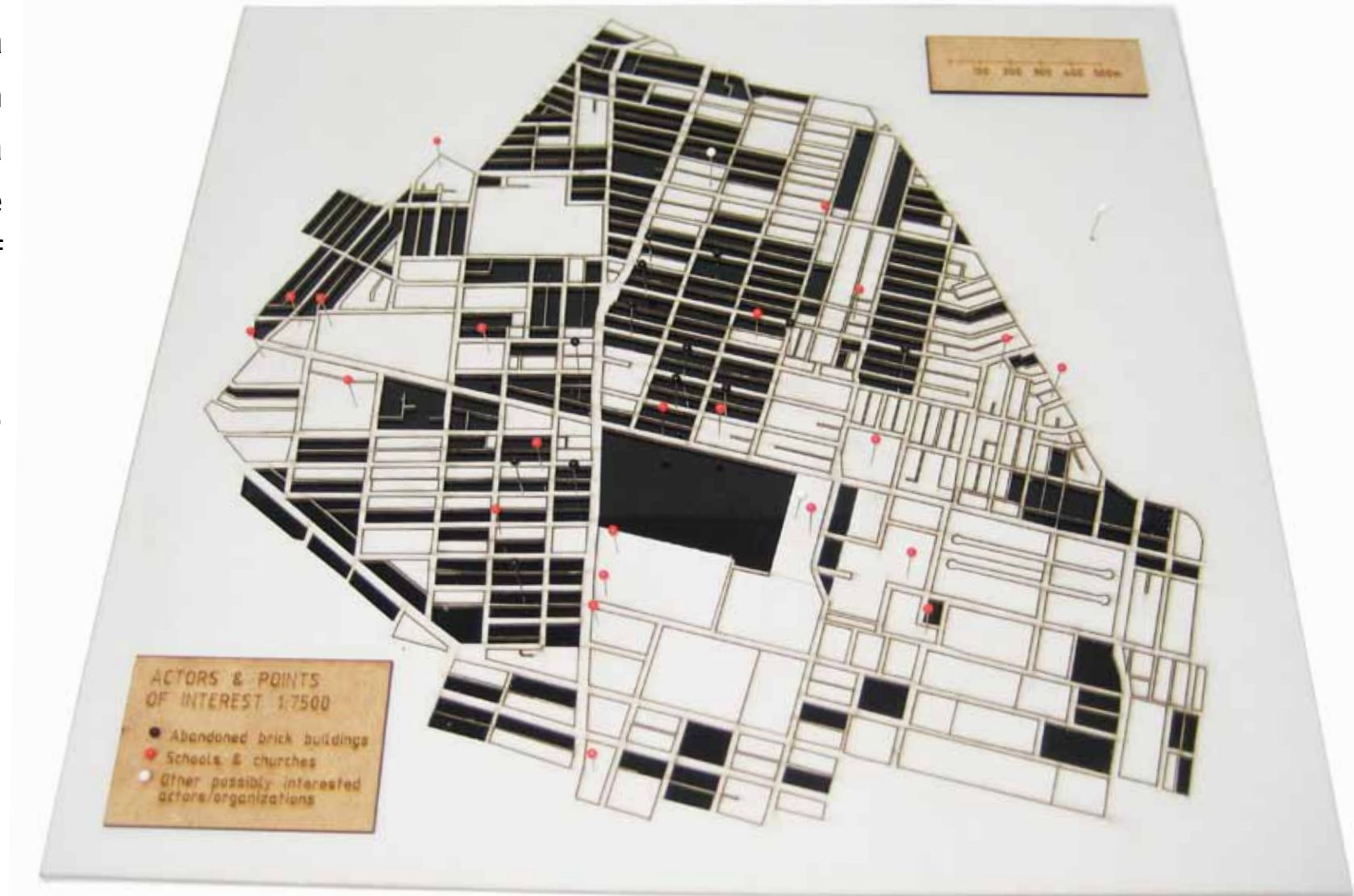
There is a myriad of reasons that the Pruitt-Igoe wasteland has been left in its abandoned state for over thirty-five years, many of them economical, and most of them touched upon only superficially, if at all, in this text. This thesis does not intend to explore or establish the details of all the factors that play a part in the decision-making (or lack thereof) concerning the fate of the Pruitt-Igoe wasteland. Instead, it seeks the more abstract and symbolic reasons for the way this space is regarded today, and the way we can imagine its future.

In order to develop a proposal for the Pruitt-Igoe site I have attempted to find possible answers to the suite of questions from the Design Approaches chapter, trying to imagine a future for the site that keeps it inclusive while not losing any of its current qualities or rupturing its timeline.

HOW CAN ALTERING THE CONTEXT OF THE SITE CHANGE ITS VALUE?

As it is today, the Pruitt-Igoe site can be seen as a large, empty center of an area of urban abandonment. However, within this area exists a living community. By opening up the Pruitt-Igoe site, it could become the center of this net of activity instead of rupturing it.

The Pruitt-Igoe Forest could be a public space in St. Louis telling an **ALTERNATIVE HISTORY** of the city and offering **ALTERNATIVE POSSIBILITIES** for its visitors.



Model showing the area. Black lots are vacant.

WHAT MATERIALS EXIST ON THE SITE THAT MIGHT BE USEFUL?

- The Pruitt-Igoe site contains a large amount of rubble. After removing the materials that may be possible to reuse in construction, such as bricks, the remaining rubble could be covered in soil and new vegetation could be planted on top. These **RUBBLE MOUNDS** would change the topography of site and let the visitors of the space literally walk on top of its history.

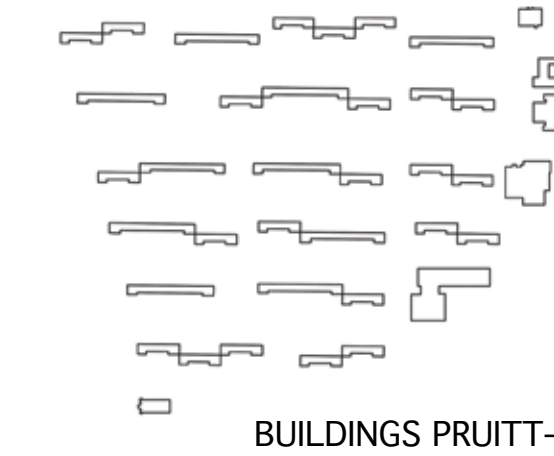


-Around the Pruitt-Igoe site, there is a large number of abandoned brick buildings, many of them affected by so-called brick theft - the illegal stealing of part of or entire brick facades to sell the used bricks. Many of these homes are now unsalvagable. By letting part of the Pruitt-Igoe site become a legitimate **BRICKYARD AND FLEAMARKET**, the site would gain an identity and the bricks of these crumbling houses would live on in new construction.



WHOSE/WHAT STORY SHOULD BE TOLD?

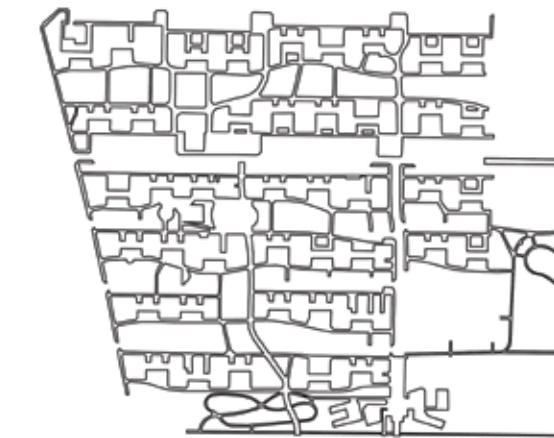
The Pruitt-Igoe site has a traumatic and ambiguous history that cannot, and should not be forgotten. By using fragments of the plans of both the Pruitt-Igoe project and the DeSoto Carr area, a **MEMORY PROMENADE** could be created on the site. This promenade lays the ground for a new public space with new uses and new activity while at the same time echoing the history of the space.



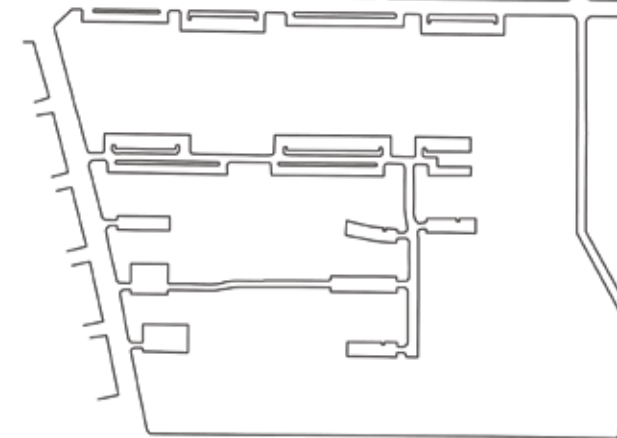
BUILDINGS PRUITT-IGOE



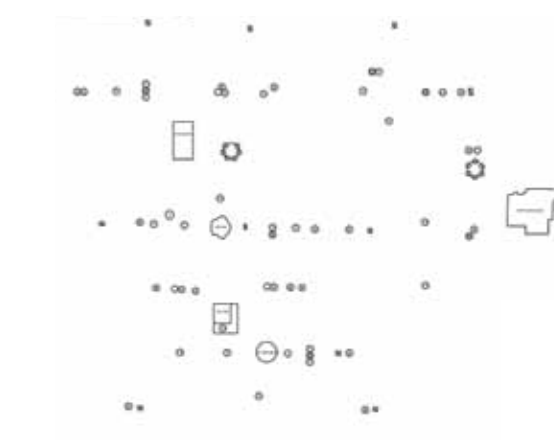
PARCELS DESOTO CARR



SECONDARY ROADS PRUITT-IGOE



PRIMARY ROADS PRUITT-IGOE



COMMON SPACES PRUITT-IGOE



PROGRAMMES DESOTO-CARR



Model of historical layers + the proposal for Pruitt-Igoe Forest.

WHO DOES/SHOULD THE SITE BELONG TO?

While the Pruitt-Igoe Forest would be open for anyone and everyone, it could be cocreated and programmed by the community existing on and around the site. This is a community which, just like the community of the Pruitt-Igoe project, has a large percentage of very young members.

Most of the playgrounds drawn by the architects of the Pruitt-Igoe project were never built. In the Pruitt-Igoe Forest, new, wilder playgrounds could be placed in the spaces where these playgrounds were planned but never realized. These **WASTE PLAYGROUNDS**, offering possibilities for loud, exploratory, experimental play could be programmed by the children living in the area today.

Other already existing initiatives, such as the Sweet Potato Project and the Northside Workshop could also use the Forest and the abandoned Pruitt School for their activity.



PLACEMENT OF EXISTING PROGRAMMES

The site could offer spaces for many organizations that are active in St. Louis and, more specifically, the area surrounding the site. The former Pruitt-School could serve as **KITCHENS** and **CLASSROOMS** for the Sweet Potato Project as well as **WORKSHOP** rooms for the Northside Workshop. The Office of Sustainability, that recently organized a Design competition concerning plans for vacant lots in the city, could carry out **EXPERIMENTAL DEVELOPMENT** for abandoned areas on a small scale within the forest. The Griot Museum of Black History, located a few hundred meters North of the site, could arrange **EXHIBITIONS** along the Memory Promenade...

NORTHSIDE WORKSHOP



BEEKEEPING
EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS
SMALL-SCALE URBAN
FARMING
ART PROJECTS

THE OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY,
WASHINGTON UNI. ST LOUIS



CHESS PARK
SUNFLOWER PLANTING
BICYCLE PARKING/
RENTING

URBAN FARMING
SHIPPING CONTAINER
RESTAURANT
MARKETS/FESTIVALS



THE SWEET POTATO PROJECT



PLANTING SWEET
POTATOES
SELLING AND
ADVERTISING
KITCHENS AND
DESIGN WORK-
SHOPS

PROPOSED NEW PROGRAMMES

Through conversations between designers, children, teachers and employees at the schools and churches in the area, the waste playgrounds could be co-created and programmed according to existing needs and wants of the community. For example: Some schools in the area have lost funding to take students on field trips by bus: the Pruitt-Igoe site could provide an excellent space for **NATURE FIELD TRIPS** within walking distance. There is collaboration between schools and artist's organizations; for example, at the Jefferson Elementary School, students have painted the stairs to the entrance in bright colours. The Pruitt-Igoe Forest could set the scene for this on a larger scale: **PAINTING** and **BUILDING** could be activities fit for the waste playgrounds as well as **PLANTING** flowers, herbs and vegetables in flower beds. Some churches organize after-school activities as well as "Single's nights" and walks on the weekends, all activities that could be carried out within the borders of the Pruitt-Igoe Forest.

SCHOOLS & CHURCHES



"(The site) is an outside source that is really really close. And sometimes we don't have bus money to go on field trips, so that's a good opportunity. You know, walk a few steps over, and you could still get some learning."

-Ms. Petty, Pre-school teacher, Jefferson Elementary



"You could have colourful walls, like a **maze**, something like that, or we could have a gardens where we can grow big flowers and stuff, **flowers everywhere**, a pathway we could walk through, and signs of different flowers."

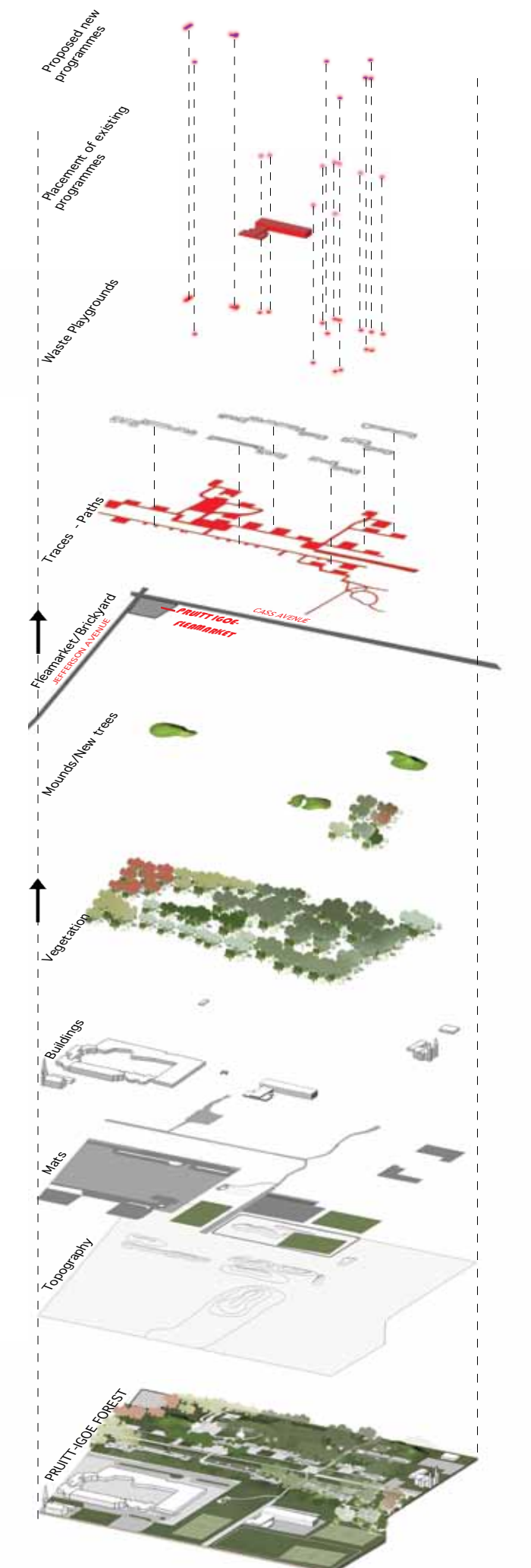
- Anthony, 10 years old

PRUITT-IGOE FOREST

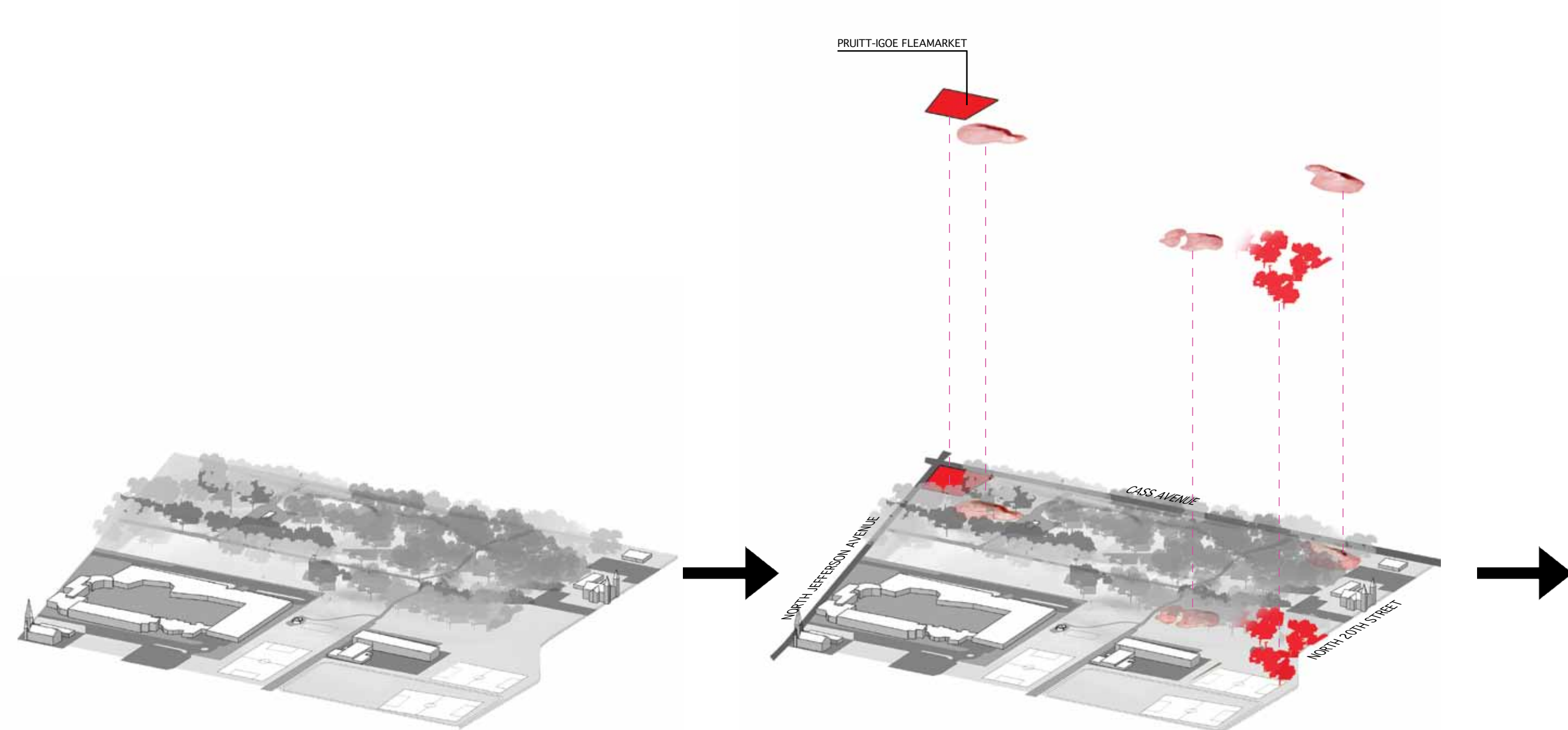
- Proposed new programmes
- Existing programmes placed on site
- Traces: The waste playgrounds
- Traces: The fragmented traces of the Pruitt-Igoe buildings
- Traces: The memory promenade
- The Pruitt-Igoe brickyard and fleamarket
- Rubble mounds and newly planted vegetation

Existing condition

PRUITT-IGOE FOREST

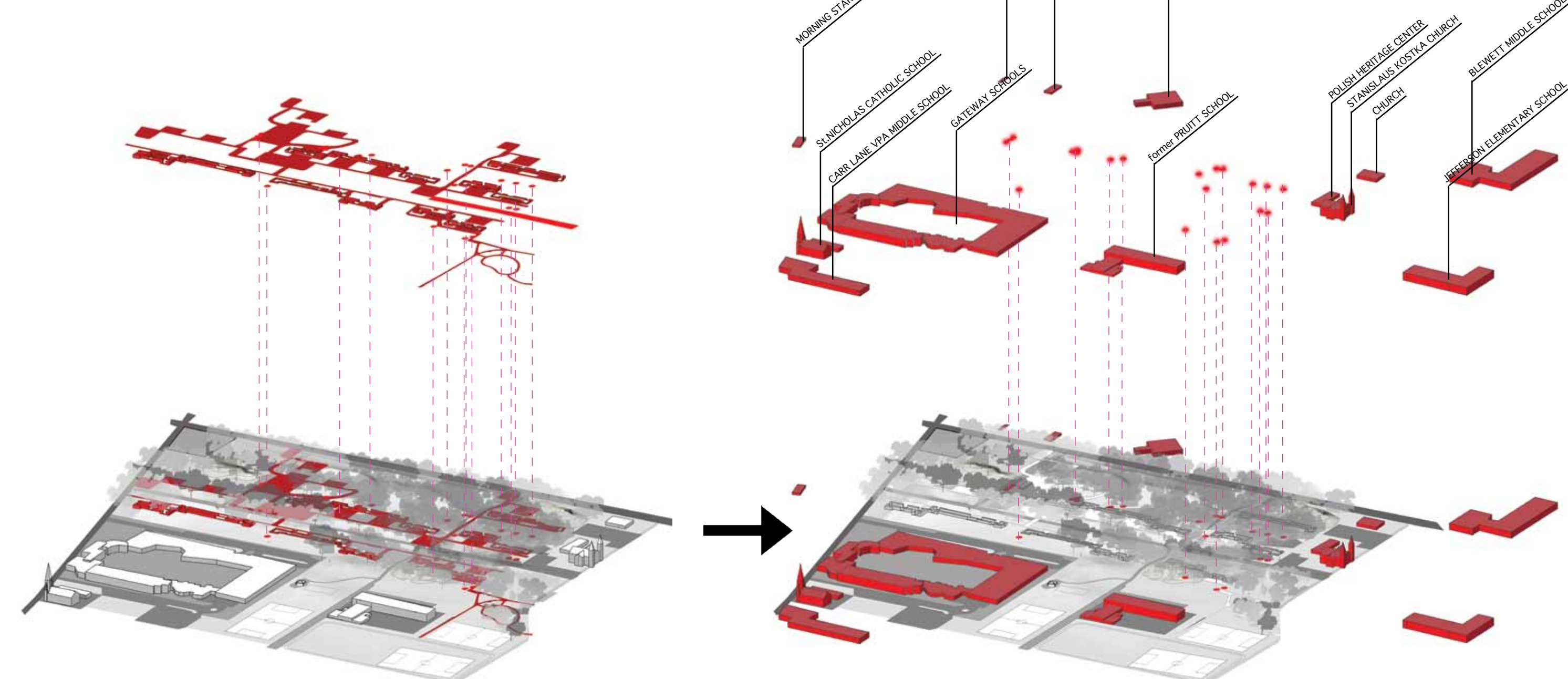


2012



- ESTABLISHING** fleamarket/brickyard in the corner of Jefferson and Cass.
- SORTING** rubble
- CONSTRUCTING** mounds
- PLANTING** new trees connecting the forest to North 20th Street

2022



- CREATING** memory promenade from Pruitt-Igoe/DeSoto Carr traces
- BUILDING** outlines of the Pruitt-Igoe buildings
- CLEARING** waste playgrounds

- PROGRAMMING** waste playgrounds
- CONNECTING** actors



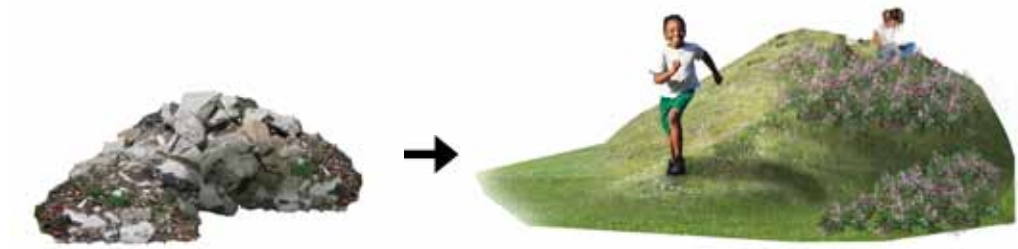
Plan of the Pruitt-Igoe Forest 1:4 000 N

[DSP] DeSoto Park



DeSoto Park remains, providing a different kind of park landscape to the forest itself.

[rm] Rubble Mounds



Mounds are created by collecting and covering the rubble on the site and planting new vegetation on top of it.

[V] New Vegetation



New vegetation is planted, connecting the forest to North 20th Street and providing a medium between the forest landscape and the park landscape of DeSoto Park.

[CC] New Community Center



In the former Pruitt School, a new community center is established, providing space for local organizations and after-school activities.



[BY] PRUITT-IGOE BRICKYARD AND FLEAMARKET

View looking South-East from the corner of Jefferson and Cass Avenues.



[MP] MEMORY PROMENADE

View looking East toward St. Stanislaus Kostka Church. The spine of the memory promenade is Dickson street, which ran through both the Pruitt-Igoe project and the DeSoto Carr area.



[bt] FRAGMENTED TRACES OF THE PRUITT-IGOE BUILDINGS

Where some of the Pruitt-Igoe buildings once stood is now fragmented traces in the shape of low walls and flowerbeds, built mainly out of waste materials found on and around the site.



[wp] WASTE PLAYGROUND

The waste playgrounds can be programmed according to the needs and wants of the school children in the area and allows for wilder, louder explorative play as well as a chance to interact with nature.

P R O P O S A L

END OF TIMELINE SHOWN IN MASTER'S THESIS FINAL EXHIBITION,
MODIFIED TO BETTER FIT THE FORMAT OF THE BOOK

RETHINKING WASTE
åsa berggren U+A/DL 2012/13

8. Conclusions

It is a problematic relationship we have to all the things we throw away - while vague notions of sustainability and recycling are becoming more and more ubiquitous, the mounds in giant hidden-away landfills are growing, as is the collective desire for new, faster, shinier things. Waste, in this equation, becomes connected to a feeling of guilt, which we try to ignore rather than question or deal with. Looking at waste differently does not mean denying or eliminating it: certain things *need* to be discarded and rejected. Instead, acceptance of the decline and death of material things, as well as of the less-than-perfect nature of spaces in the city, may allow us to see their potential as well as the problems they pose.

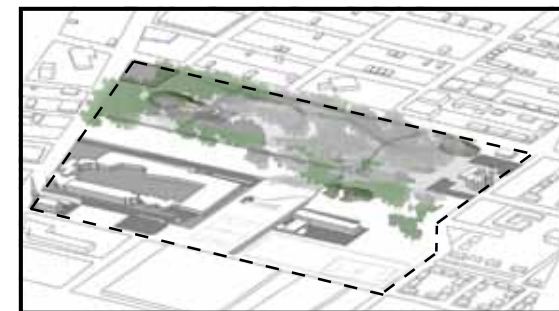
In urban planning, the widely sought-after 'mixed development' or 'mixed use' city is a blurred ideal image of an environment where garbage often does not seem to have a place at all unless it is being disposed in recycling containers by well-adjusted

citizens; what happens to it after it is swallowed up in the darkness of these vessels is unclear. The same goes for many groups of people in the planning of public space: what happens to the homeless when city parks are designed to keep them from sleeping on the benches? What happens to the inhabitants of slum areas when their homes are razed to give way to shopping centres and homes for middle class families? Where do we go, when the entire city is new and clean and programmed, to see alternative views, to scream without disturbing anyone or to experience the thrill of the unpredictable?

As discussed in this thesis, there are many ways of implementing this alternative view - of possibilities and potential rather than only problems - in a development or redevelopment process. While literally re- or upcycling waste materials is sometimes a valuable part of an urban development project, it is not the only, nor perhaps the most

2014

Pruitt-Igoe Fleamarket and Brickyard is opened. The rubble on the site is sorted and lays the ground for new mounds in the South-Eastern and Northern parts of the site. New vegetation is planted south of the St. Stanislaus Kostka Church to connect the forest to DeSoto park and North 20th Street.



The Pruitt-Igoe site 2014

2020

A promenade through the forest is created using fragments of the plans of Pruitt-Igoe and the DeSoto Carr slum area, and traces of some of the former Pruitt-Igoe buildings are built. On the points where playgrounds and other recreational spaces were planned but never realized within the Pruitt-Igoe project, trees are cleared to form spaces to be programmed.

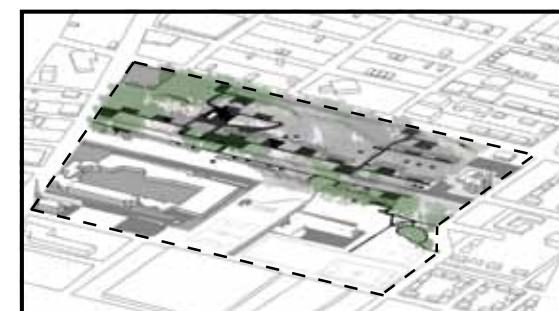


2022

Researching through dialogue the activities, events and needs of the many schools, churches and organizations in the surrounding area, the programming work of the 'waste playgrounds' is started. Permanent as well as temporary programs such as planting, small-scale farming and art projects continually activate the forest.



The Pruitt-Igoe site 2022



The Pruitt-Igoe site 2022



" It's an outside source that is really really close. And sometimes we don't have bus money to go on field trips, so that's a good opportunity. You know, walk a few steps over, and you could still get some learning."
-Ms. Petty, Pre-school teacher, Jefferson Elementary

crucial, answer to our problems regarding waste. Instead, it is altering our view towards not only waste objects, but people and spaces that are considered problematic or unimportant that will potentially lay the ground for more inclusive, enabling and rich public space. It is also clear that development projects that aim for co-ownership and co-responsibility, involving people closely linked to the site as well as professionals from interdisciplinary fields, open up a wide range of possibilities that could never have been imagined if solely designers unrelated to the area had made all of the decisions.

Accepting waste is, to an extent, also accepting the passage of time and the change it inevitably brings. For that reason, planning spaces that are allowed to develop and grow - rather than deciding before their birth what exactly they will become - is a step in the direction of creating public space that inherit the merits - the flexibility, openness and inclusiveness -

of wastespaces. Waste also has an inherent quality of narrative: it tells the story of something past, something lost. Taking into consideration the history of a space and letting it co-exist with the future we imagine for it is complicated, but crucial to the way we relate to the life cycle of things and spaces. If a space cyclically returns to a 'blank page' stage as soon as its contents are considered unwanted, we may lose the sense of what the city is, and how we are connected to it, because we have erased all the traces of what it once was. If that which is declining or dying is routinely cleared and hidden away, it suggests to us that the only valuable thing is the *new* thing. In reality, however, death is inevitable. Not all cities can be growing, and for this reason, abandonment is sometimes unavoidable. Perhaps, instead of instinctively searching for catalysts for 'urban regeneration' or rebirth, we should find strategies of letting areas peacefully die out, as well as explore the alternative possibilities created in the process.

Our need to label certain objects, people and spaces as wasted or unwanted is not questionable, but the grounds on which we base these judgements are. When the boundaries inside which objects are considered valuable become narrower, so does our scope of possibilities - both inside and outside the realm of urban planning and architecture. It is not a question of mindlessly accepting the things we find troublesome, repulsive or mundane; but rather a need to consciously and slightly alter our viewpoints. By opening the door to the possibility of even the things we regard as most unimportant and useless having value, the potential of the city - and the buildings, spaces and people it houses - multiplies infinitely.

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RETHINKING WASTE

A study of the CONCEPT and HANDLING of WASTESPACES
through the case of PRUITT- IGOE

Words such as 'waste', 'rubbish', 'trash' and 'garbage' conjure up certain problematic images for most of us. These are words that imply separation, abandonment, loss, decline and, potentially, failure and death. Yet they are an inevitable part not only of consumerist society, but of life itself, and cannot be ignored. In all societies, throughout history, there have been, are, and will be waste things, waste people, wasted lives and wasted time.

However, **nothing is intrinsically waste**. Waste is the opposite of that which a society considers useful, clean, productive or desirable. Waste is defined by an order that is not absolute: though the existence of waste is constant, its definition differs from culture to culture, from time to time.

Waste in relation to space can take many forms. Wastespaces, urban wastelands, drosspaces, urban voids, terrains vagues or dead zones can be found all over the civilized world, be it in the shape of former industrial sites, wild greenspaces, ruins or vacant lots. These landscapes, often considered problematic eye-sores, represent the forgotten, the abandoned, the thrown away - that which is considered wasted.

Can these inevitable waste landscapes, unwanted people and thrown away objects serve a valueable purpose in the otherwise increasingly homogenized and ordered city and in the lives of its citizens? Using the example of the growing wasteland left behind after the demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe project in St. Louis, Missouri, this thesis aims to explore the merits of waste and wastespaces, both symbolic and practical. Furthermore, it looks for possibilities and examples of how to retain these potential merits when redeveloping urban wastespaces, as well as incorporating the same values into the design of new public space.

ÅSA BERGGREN
Master's Thesis
Chalmers University of Technology
Göteborg, Sweden 2013

ISBN 978-91-637-3287-4