



**THE
MOTHER
CULTURE**

THE MOTHER CULTURE

EXPLORING THE URBAN MARGIN

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Auburn University MLA
Design Research Thesis
2015



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INK

some

love
is
life





THE SPIRIT OF THE PROJECT





This entire publication is the culmination of the results from a nine month long design thesis investigation that sought to discover new conditions and methods pertaining to the profession and practice of landscape architecture. The investigation was limited to the state of Alabama; therefore, I chose to primarily focus on a condition within the city that has been my home for the past six years, Auburn. In the beginnings of this work, brainstorming began in the realm of understanding the complex nature of our contemporary urban conditions, particularly regarding the collective of species and energies (not just humans) that make up these dynamic spaces. Inspired by *Emergence Theory in Landscape Architecture* by Rod Barnett and *The Politics of Nature* by Bruno Latour, the journey towards finding a gap in the discipline of landscape architecture began with sketches trying to interpret these theories into the realm of urban design. After one half of a sketchbook was filled with hypothetical but valuable iterations of conditions in which the urban condition was an insurgent landscape for exotic forces (waste, vigilantes, dirt, weeds, animals, non-traditional religions, alternate weather conditions), I chose to finally land on a site in order to see how these theories touched the ground. How could these aspects of urban landscapes be incorporated into design or even the profession?

The work presented within this publication is my journey through the iterations of understanding how to give context, spaciality, materiality, spirituality, and essence of place to these explorations. This was a complex journey that is captured here in a highly curated way. If you haven't come to this publication with an open mind, you better open it up. Be prepared to jump in and out of scale and to blend your scholastic and spiritual understandings of landscapes.

hard edge

hard edge

hard edge

hard edge



new plants sustain similar ecology



grounds for experimentation in self-organizing systems.

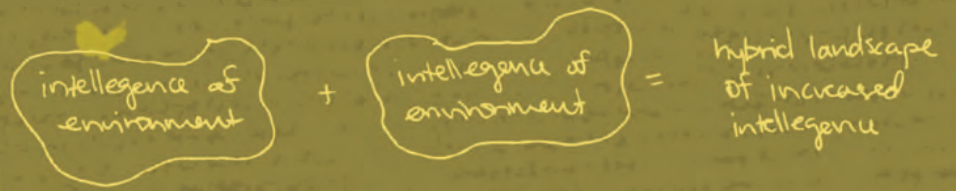
— how can humans do this with traditional design

Emergence

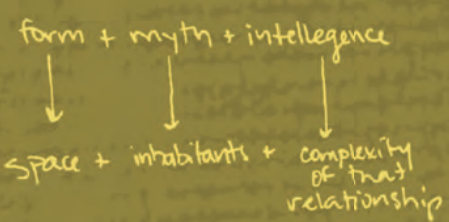
Existing landscape + disturbance or phenomenon = adapted, more complex landscape

adaptation + complexity = intelligence

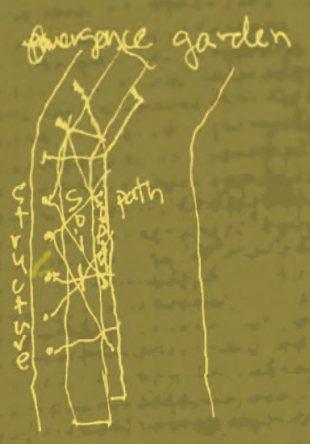
roof similar to prairie



breeding experiment

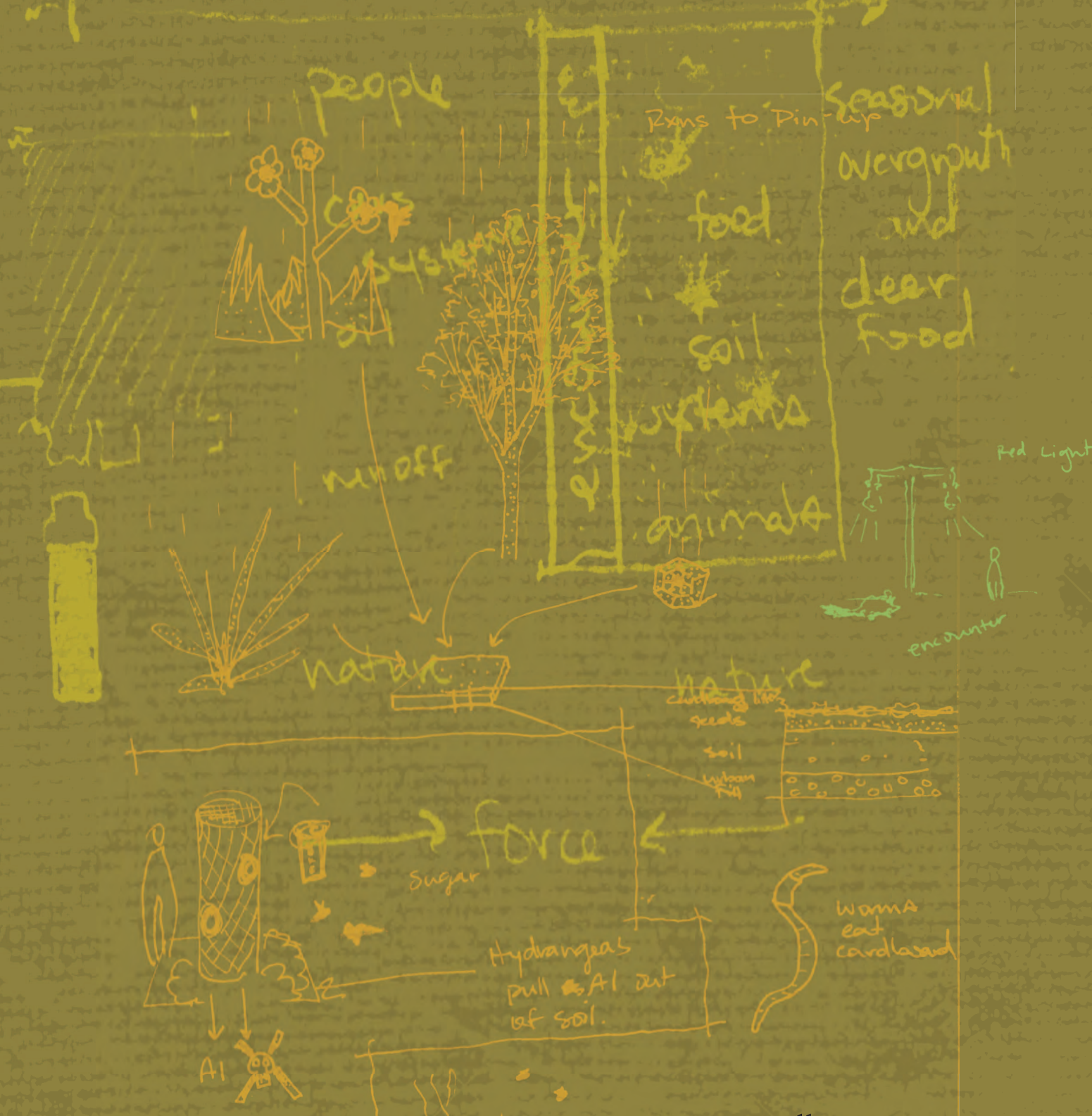


Experiments in Landscape



What will grow from ~~under~~ soil under a pavilion in Dudley courtyard?

WELCOME TO BALLMART





INTRODUCTION

Social organization for the human species is fundamentally tied to the urban form. Even primitive in their beginnings, these early cities were the first forms resulting from interactions within communities of humans, including agriculture and settlement. In this dwelling with one another and our landscape, humans have adapted to centralize or social structure and share our values and responsibilities in groups.

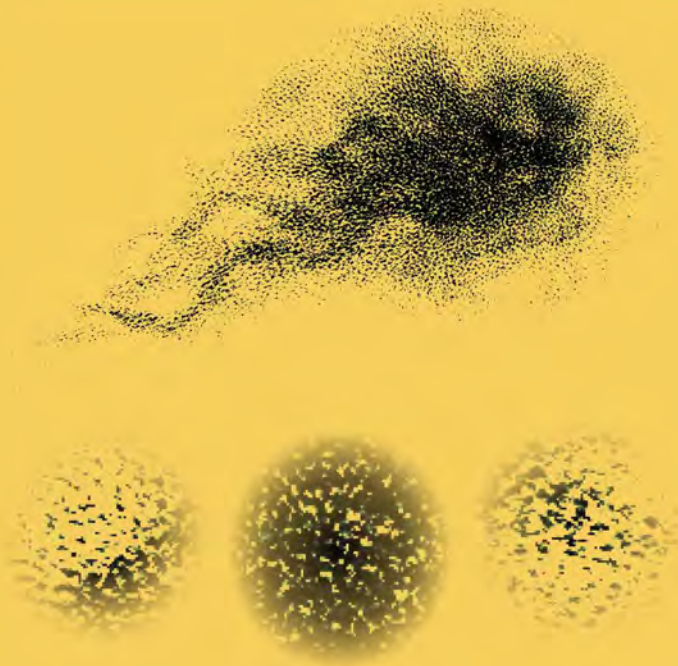
City-building is the expressive form of the progress and story of these social structures over time. And over the millenia, cities continue to increase in complexity, reflecting the iteration and advancement of human society and invention. In today's culture, the beast is now alive. Our cities have their own behavior, a behavior formed by the collective of inhabitants within them. Both shared and debated values and responsibilities within a collective of species, materials, and forces makes for such a rich, dynamic, chaotic system. Scientists like to claim that the final frontier of discovery is either outer space or the ocean's depths. Try today's cities. In fact, explorations in chaos theory are one of the single most valuable tools that contemporary designers have. Not only are they the predecessor to concepts such as emergence and complexity, but they are the next level of understanding within our urban conditions and ultimately the next advancement of awareness within collective society¹.

Cities are our stories. It is our yearning of self-exploration that drives us to understand them better and continue design research to find new ways of building. Centralized command structures dominate the early iterations of human society and civilization, and human progress has resulted in a story of human victory over the challenges of nature which has caused a separation ontologically between the place in which we contextualize ourselves². But in retrospect, this steady separation seems regressive. Ultimately humans are creatures that have evolved from the biome of planet earth, just like all of the creatures that share this planet with us. Yet, we are constantly obsessed with the dissolution of human superiority and division of "humans vs. nature." This division has been interpreted in a polar way, where one end of the spectrum produces ideas like "manifest destiny" the other end sees nature as exclusively transcendental to humans through our senses of spirituality. And thusly, these values are reflected in contemporary urban design. The modernism movement penned the phrase "form follows function", but we are now faced with a era of design that wrestles with the principle that "orientation follows value."

In reading our urban landscapes, in dissecting them, in truly listening to them, relationships that we have with places come forth. We can think of our urban agglomerations not as just one single landscape, but many landscapes that share space and time, a matrix of landscapes popping in and out of existence. Tim Richardson writes, " A landscape or garden has no beginning and no end: it flows like fluid into every other corner of the earth, irrigating and mingling with other space flavors. It also flows into the brain, body and personality of every person who experiences it, and is nurtured and enriched by the symbiosis of emotions and ideas between person and place."³ Our landscapes, our places, are more than just space. They are charged with energy of life that possesses the landscape, animating it. And as we think exclusively of the productivity of landscapes through agriculture or another commoditized product, we devalue the creation of cultural, expressive energies or moments that take form from chaos before being swallowed by it once more. Through the collective energy of all voices of the landscape, we all produce the experience of our lives. Lives and processes that both require energy and produce it.

When faced with the task of giving form to existence, a hierarchy of intent manifests. What we think about our own selves, our own existence, our own context in our environment, impresses upon our mind a system of values. And as we work as a collective, these values start to become shared. And as form transitions into collective form, values become the hierarchy of organization. And as all life continues to explore itself, those forms give meaning to space.

CHAOS THEORY AND URBAN COMMUNITIES?



Chaos theory explores the edge of predictability and randomness. It brings light not only to how systems are formed but also the manner in which they become disorganized. For instance, it explains swarm or hive behavior. What is the edge of predictability by which the flight of birds within a group can be described? It explains the complex way in which termites form social structures and share responsibility not through a centralized command center, but through swarm or hive behavior, constantly taking new cues from chemical and physical communication between individuals. Newton's first law of thermodynamics tells us that energy is conserved in any reaction. Chaos theory is the journey towards finding the non-linear way in which that energy is distributed. We see now that even after what is perceived as a death, the dynamic processes of our physical universe carry on. We are formed from many to one, and we leave from one to many, but the energy is conserved. This is directly applicable to understanding how our cities can be better designed for a collective of individuals.

THE VALUE OF THE SUBVERSIVE

THERE IS ALWAYS A MANIFESTATION OF VALUES IN DESIGN. AND IN THIS MANIFESTATION, THERE IS THE CREATION OF SACRED AND SUBVERSIVE, A DUALITY CREATED BY HUMANS FOR THE DENIAL OF THE FULL SELF. WHERE THE SACROSANCT REPRESENTS WITHIN OURSELVES THE DESIRE FOR COMFORT, STABILITY, AND SECURITY, THE SUBVERSIVE INSIGHTS OUR SEDITIONARY CURIOSITY AND LEADS US ON A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY THROUGH THE MYSTERIOUS UNKNOWN. URBAN DESIGN VERNACULAR HAS TRADITIONALLY MAINTAINED A DIALOGUE THAT REPRESENTS VARIOUS WORLDVIEWS, WHETHER THEY CLAIM THAT HUMAN VALUES ARE GIVEN OBJECTIVELY OR FORMULATED SUBJECTIVELY. BUT A GREATER UNDERSTANDING IN THE PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THESE THEORIES MAY CAST SUCH A DUALISM IN ANOTHER LIGHT. NEVERTHELESS, THE SACRED IS GIVEN PREFERENCE IN URBAN FORM, AND THE SUBVERSIVE IS LEFT TO OCCUPY MARGINALIZED SPACE. AND SINCE THIS DUALISTIC PARADIGM EXISTS, THE PROGRESS OF DESIGN THEORY REQUIRES A RECONSTRUCTION. THEREFORE, I PROPOSE THAT THE PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE SACRED VS. THE SUBVERSIVE IN DESIGN THEORY IMBIBE THE SACRED AS HAVING A POWER PRESENT AND THE SUBVERSIVE AS HAVING POWER LATENT. THAT IS THAT THE POWER PRESENT IS VISIBLE, UTILIZED, HALLOWED; AND THE POWER LATENT

It is generally accepted that landscapes and gardens are imbued with meanings that are derived from how and why we know them, and who we are. The perceived properties of all objects depend on the personality and culture of the reviewer; therefore, as we perceive a place visually, we instantaneously interpret its meanings. Each person sees each place in a different way. In this sense, we see the gardens not as they are, but as we are.

Tim Richardson⁴

IS THAT WHICH HAS THE SAME POWER WITHOUT THE PRIVILEGE OF CREATIVE ATTENTION.

THE POWER OF OUTCAST SPACES, MATERIALS, AND VOICES, REINVENTS THE VALUE SYSTEM OF THE MARGINALIZED BY MEASURING THE POTENTIAL FOR RE-CREATION. AS THIS POTENTIAL IS UNDERSTOOD AND CHOREOGRAPHED IN OUR CITIES, NEW PLACES AND TYPOLOGIES OF LANDSCAPE BEGIN TO EMERGE. NEW LANGUAGES ARISE FROM THE CROSS POLLINATION OF INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS AND THE CHAOS OF NEW SYSTEMS. THIS TOO BEGS AN EXPANSION IN WESTERN DESIGN VERNACULAR THAT PUSHES AGAINST THE SPIRIT OF "CREATING BETTER" AND EXPERIMENTS WITH "FINDING NEW." THE DEVELOPMENT OF DESIGN TO HARNESS UNDERVALUED POTENTIAL CREATES THE ABILITY FOR THE CITY AS WELL AS THE PERSON TO BE BROUGHT INTO FULLNESS OF LIFE, BUT FIRST THE MARGINALIZED VOICES MUST BE FOLDED INTO THE LARGER CONVERSATION OF PROGRESSIVE URBAN DESIGN.



“ A landscape or garden has no beginning and no end: it flows like a river into every other corner of the earth, irrigating and mingling with other space avors. It also flows into the brain, body and personality of every person who experiences it, and is nurtured and enriched by the symbiosis of emotions and ideas between person and place.”

Tim Richardson⁵

IN THE WEEDS

Auburn, Alabama sits within a distinct ecological condition, the edge condition between the Southern Piedmont (to the north) and the Coastal Plain (to the south). The edge condition is the blurred space where one ecotone meets another (think about the middle of a Venn diagram). The edge condition not only collects species from both regions but is especially dense and lush with consistent rainfall, rich alluvial soil, and humid heat. Tectonic ridges from the Piedmont merging with the general flatness of the Coastal Plane create a diversity of microclimates within the edge condition.⁶ This is reflected in Auburn through the ephemeral experience of diverse vegetation throughout the year. To get lost in the weeds of this ecotone is to stumble into a rich new world of discovery.



NADEL-SCHW
Marasmius perforans (H)

Potentia, like so many other words, has had its meanings separated out, and has come, in our day, to be both *potency* and *potentiality*-- that is to say, both the power present and the power latent, that can but has not yet come into being. In Latin, these words are the same word. And this is a wisdom. For the *potentiality* is also a present power with which we must deal and to which we must speak. A condition of general *potency*, a possibility in persons and things, not yet visible in force but present in

seed.

M.C. RICHARDS⁷

THE ROLE OF THE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT AND TRADITIONS IN SHAMANISM

In the contemporary urban landscape, design has been given the task of formulating structure and mediating a human population in a seemingly wild and non-human world. Paradigm shifts in anthropology and ecology have rendered this distinction between human lives and a non-human landscape unsustainable. New theories blur the lines between subject and object, human and nature.⁸ This is not an idea new to humans however. The ancient tradition of shamanism is an archetype of cultures cognizant of the collective and entangled lives of humans and their environment, and vice versa. Shamanism is a tradition of human landscape mediation that understands and engages with “the energies in nature and the social agencies by which such powers may be harnessed for human benefit.”⁹ Another form of this tradition is chieftdom. However, this model looks to dominate the powers of land in order to have dominion over it. Landscape in this tradition is deemed a constant battle, sewed by the social agencies of patrilineal and persistence of “the same”. The shaman equally has power through social agency, but embraces difference, empowering the marginalized and seeking balance through the manifestation of powers of the environment. “Both chiefs and shamans engage with the land on behalf of social groups. Characteristically the chiefly social group does not include women, whereas the shamanic one does.”¹⁰ Where chiefs desire to gain global power, shamans do not and rely on personal and inclusive relationships. Shamans in this matter were definitely the underdog rulers of population groups. And where as chieftdom was seen as a right, shamanism was deemed an ability, and ability which did not discriminate upon whom it fell. “Chiefly destiny was seen as absolute, manifest in the power, militancy, and achievements of the leader, and brooking no interference or dilution. This is why successful chiefs could not tolerate the myriad and unpredictable powers of shamans, for whom ‘destiny’ was but one among a host of forces about in the world.”¹¹

In the tradition of landscape architecture, the design of dynamic elements under constant flux is not a foreign concept. In fact, the profession gains distinction from many other design realms because of this challenge of landscape. Recent theories such as those portrayed in writing like *Projective Ecologies Ecological Urbanism Emergence in Landscape Architecture* and *Rambunctious Gardens*¹², bring added complexity to the issue of landscape design by bringing to light what Bruno Latour has coined “naturecultures.”¹³ This in turn opens up a new door to the role of the landscape architect. Along the lines of growing social justice practitioners around the world, landscape architects are also familiar with working closely with communities, individuals and governments, forces of nature, and otherwise indigenous aspects of the landscape. Just as the shaman empowered the marginalized and different through these social agencies, so too can the landscape architect. This model requires a practice that is tailored to difference, inclusion, and democracy, facilitating this through design and community involvement. Wielding the indigenous powers of a collective community and environment, the landscape architect cognizant of traditions in shamanism can empower artistic and cultural visionaries.





THE ISSUE

If the urban form is the poetry of space and culture, then Auburn, Alabama is a quirky little town. 30 miles from the Georgia state line in between Atlanta and Montgomery, Auburn is home of course to Auburn University. The population affiliated with the university makes up roughly 50% of the City of Auburn's population which sits at around 58,500 people.¹⁴ And during SEC football season, the population of Auburn can at times triple from the influx of game-day visitors. Needless to say, the mark of Auburn University is strong on the culture of the City of Auburn, and the two have formed a symbiotic relationship resulting mainly from shared economic benefits. Hotels, restaurants, retail, grocery, etc. all receive consistent income from the students, faculty, and administration of Auburn University who reside in the town; and during the fall, some of these businesses can be quite lucrative. Economic well-being and cultural identity, however, are not the only shared aspects between the city and the university; the city's downtown is shared with the most north-east corner of campus. You might have heard of the Auburn tradition of rolling the Oaks at Toomer's Corner after an Auburn University athletic victory. The Oaks at Toomer's Corner is where campus meets the city's downtown, which forms an L shape around the north-east corner of campus. With such a close spacial relationship, the downtown inevitably is very influenced by the presence of the university.

Auburn is an example of a small southern town dominated by a brand. Here in Auburn, the brand is a codependent relationship between Auburn University and Auburn the village, and the evidence is everywhere: classic red bricks, shops tailored to greek communities, university oriented media, war eagles, football, typical southern traditions, and bars. At first, some of these characteristics might seem nice. In fact, Auburn the town has branded itself as "The Loveliest Village on the Plains." Streets and sidewalks are kept with tidy corners and clean noses. The Disney-like, fabricated loveliness hypnotizes herds of annual visitors, while the shops and bars pacify university students. And this condition perpetuates quite a southern, traditional monoculture upon the city.

The predominant culture of the university town leaves an impression on the downtown vernacular: the ubiquity of certain materials, formal infrastructure, shops, churches, race, and entertainment. These aspects of the city draw a line between the mainstream and the underground cultures, or that is to say they create firm bookends of a condition. But of course, strict binaries are an unrealistic characterization of any cities. There is grey area in the range between wealthy white southern families and

poor racial minorities, greeks and hipsters, drones and visionaries, christians and other religions, the southern charmed and the blunt wrapping renegades. But within this whole spectrum there is an obvious inequality that is not only observed in the people that occupy the space, but in the character of urban spaces as well. There is a resonance in the city that speaks to the dynamics of social privilege and the expected cooperation with Auburn's brand and image. There seems to be a suppression of alternative public expression, the advancement of art, diverse and democratic dialogue, and counter-cultural activities.

But if the symbiotic relationship between these two establishments is so co-beneficial, then what question can be raised against it? That is the question with which this investigation started, and with this challenge, I formulated my inquiry of Auburn's urban form: If you subtracted the culture of Auburn university from the cultures represented in downtown, what subcultures would you be left with? In essence I was asking for a stronger presence of subculture in Auburn that was independent of the university. What is the strongest, most irreducible form of Auburn culture. And once I discovered that this was my gap to fill, the journey for the answer began.

In between the first four semesters of my MLA degree and my thesis year at Auburn, I took one year off to fulfill a dream and test myself in a way that I felt would push me in a direction I wanted to go: I began my own little studio and sold my paintings at local shows while waiting tables and bar tending at a restaurant. During this time, I ultimately experienced a side of Auburn that I hadn't seen before. There was a local culture of southern artists, makers, and otherwise creatives that lived and worked in the small margins between university culture. Now, that isn't to say that this subculture didn't include some students, but it was predominantly self-sustainable. And not only that, but the scene is growing and is going to have huge implications for the city and possibly the university.



www.auburn.edu

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What if this was the media portrayed in Auburn? What if these subversive cultures started to claim hold of public space in downtown Auburn?

THE
URBAN

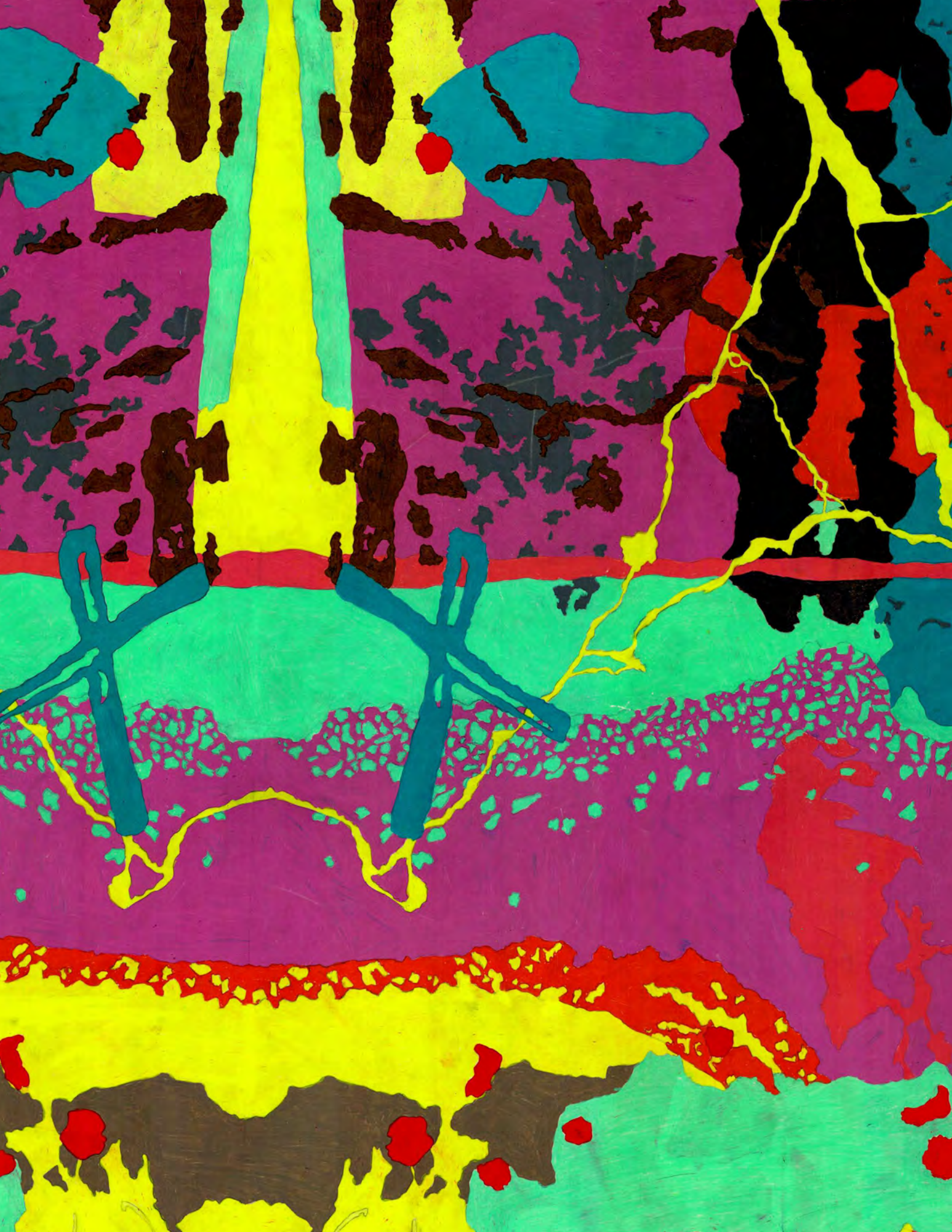
MARGIN

SUBVERSION SPEAKS



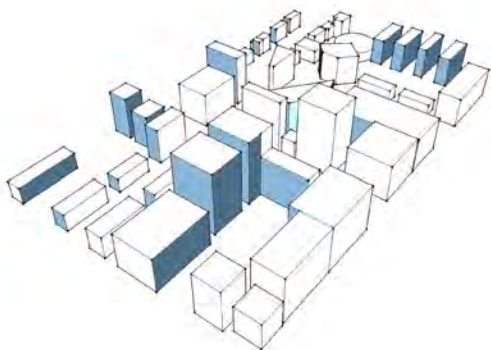
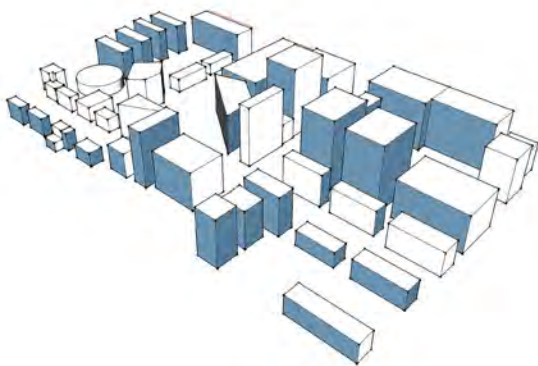
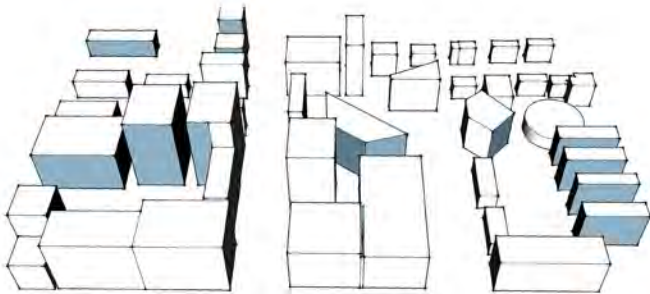
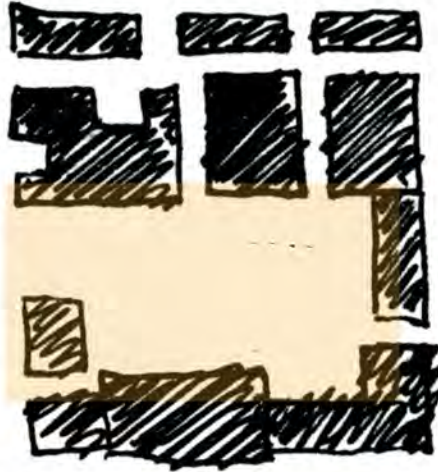
With a direction for investigation solidified, the design investigation needed a more concrete connection to landscape architecture, namely a site. But even before the selection of a site, the question was asked generally "where"? What typology of space produces the dispute of the prescribed capacity of urban landscapes. Within this new question, the investigation looked towards marginalized urban space.

It is in this grey area that true collaboration and democratic dialogue take place. It is in the margin that new forms and ideas are created out of the collision or entanglement of political, social, and ecological conditions. The margin is the place where interpretation of invisible processes reveal themselves and where true investigation can take place. And although the marginalization of these landscapes can be intuitively felt and perceived in a psychotopic lens, there are physical markers and material typologies that indicate marginalization and certain political allowances afforded to a place. The invisible dialogue takes a physical manifestation which speaks to the attitudes of a range of voices from city decision makers to citizens to temporary visitors.



In this investigation of marginalized urban spaces and networks as a place of dirty creativity, I am faced with the challenge of forging my own path towards a methodology of not only identifying these spaces, but also creating a vocabulary by which to characterize and identify forces at work in the dynamic life of these spaces. This was done on mainly two scales: the downtown and the site.

Since it is my philosophy that a city devoid of public creativity and artistic expression is dead, the methodology is geared towards the investigation of the link between urban form/orientation and culture. Therefore, the first goal was to identify and define a particular typology of urban space for investigation. In light of the link between subversive culture and the production of art (especially public), I first looked to draw a link between subversive or underground culture and urban space. In urban form, the mainstream usually is designed to be static and modern. Its forms are concrete and the revelation of time is foregone by continued maintenance. So like marginalized people groups, it seemed appropriate to seek out

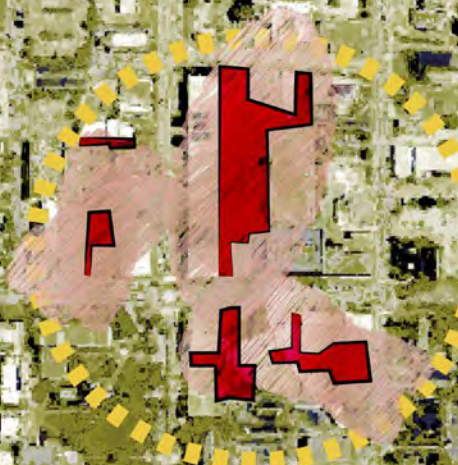


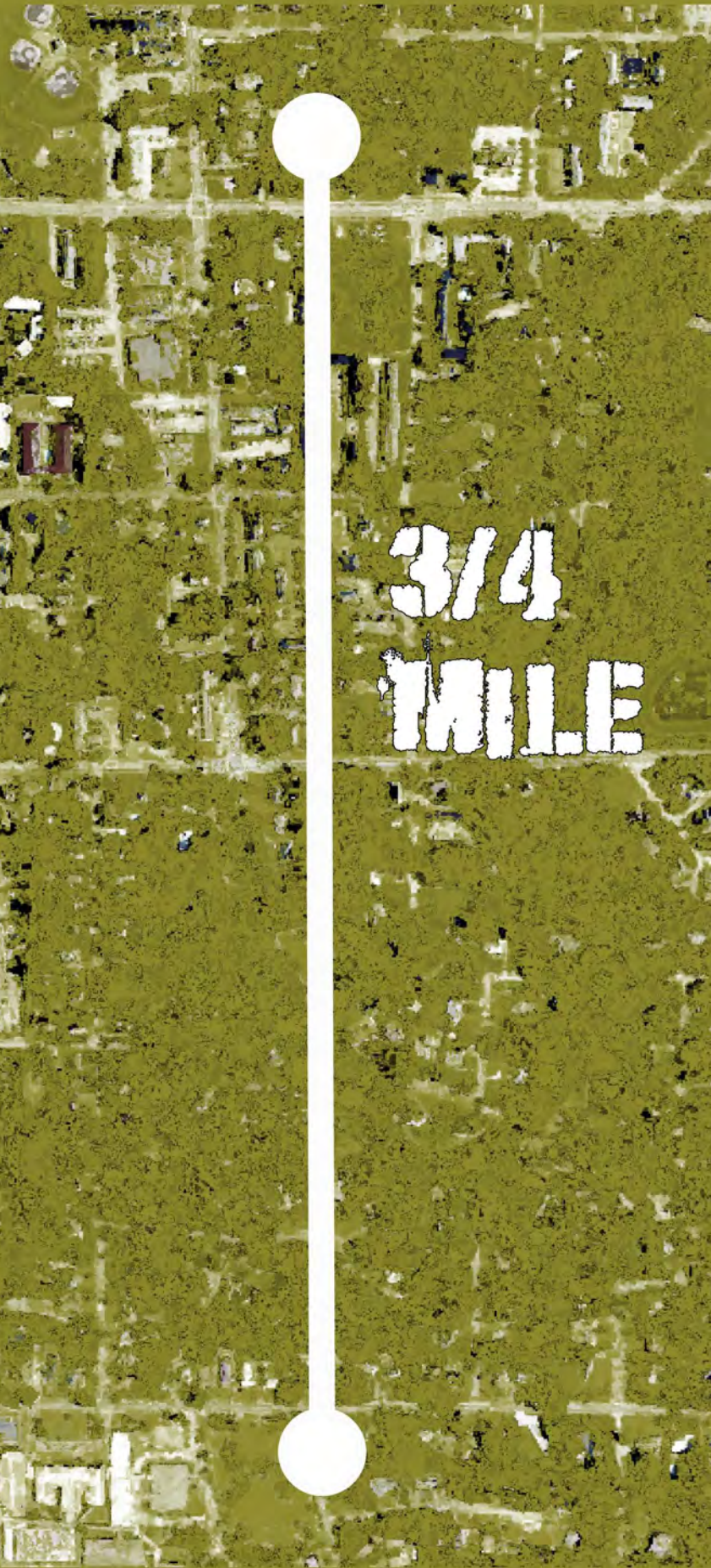
THE FIGURES ON THIS PAGE SHOW THE FORMAL CONDITIONS THAT CREATE THE URBAN MARGIN. NOTICE THE ORIENTATION OF THE BUILDINGS TO THE MAIN STREETS AND THE SUBSEQUENT SPACES FORMED.

a marginalized urban condition, and accordingly I developed a set of vocabulary by which to identify and discuss the marginalization of space. These vocabularies are based off of selected archetypes extracted from the observation of similar spaces, gauged through psychotopic emotional and intuitional reactions. These archetypes speak to both physical materiality and collective cultural processes that presence themselves in these places, a hybrid of metaphor and material, subject and object, politics and nature. The vocabulary for the site was created under four main concepts (collision, residue, territory, media) which were derived from artistic experiments in recreating places through digital photo-collage.

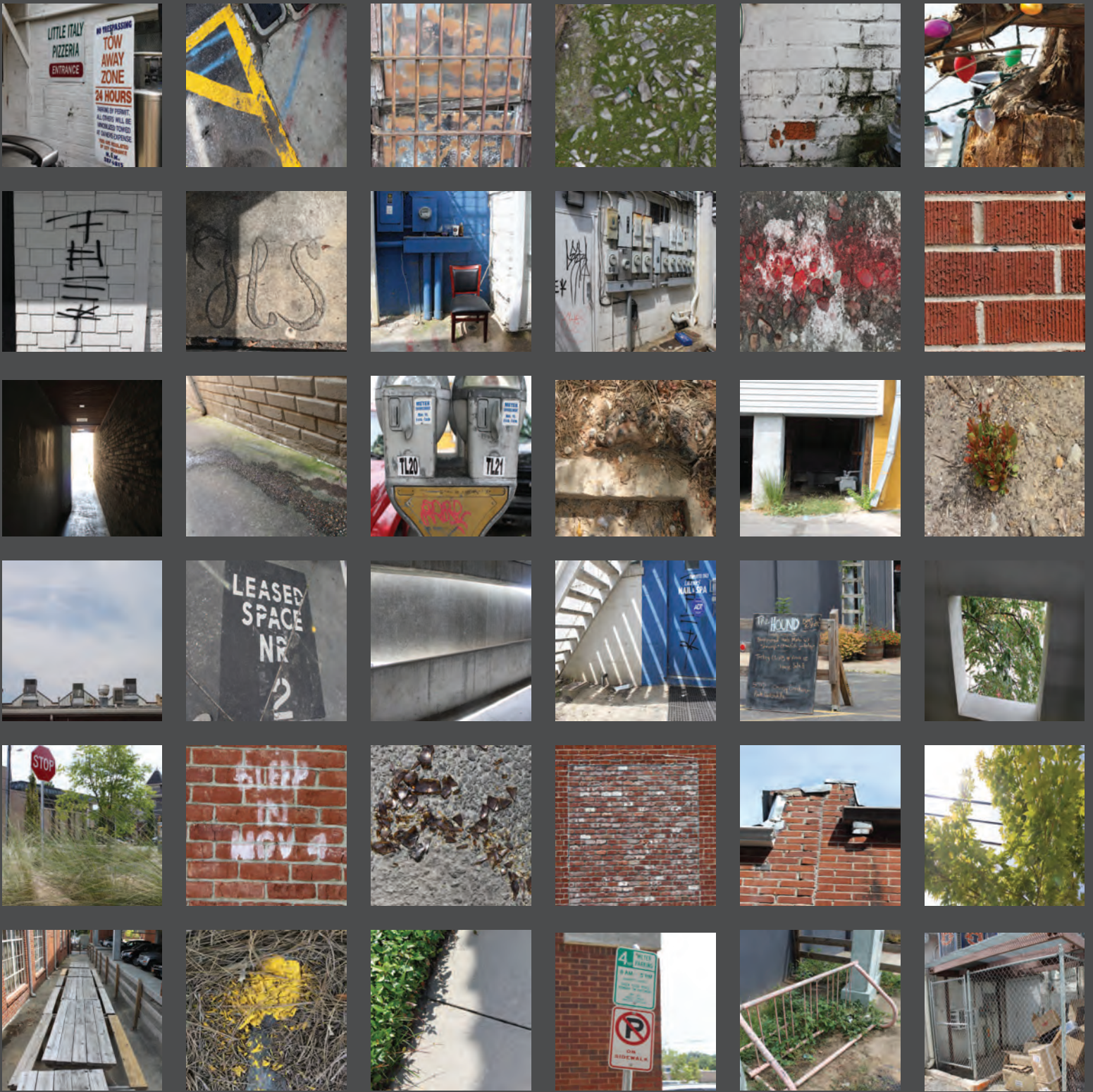


SITES

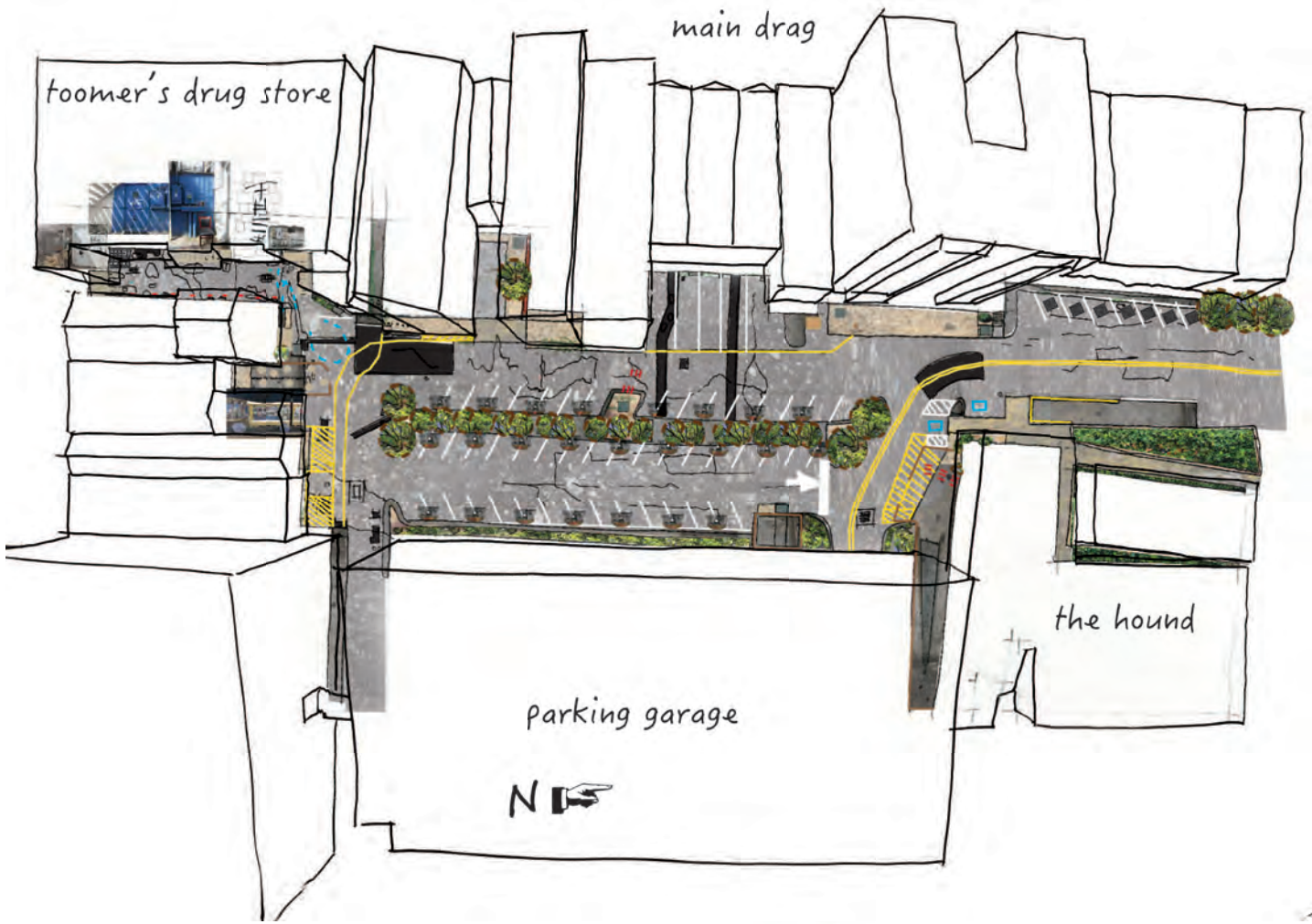




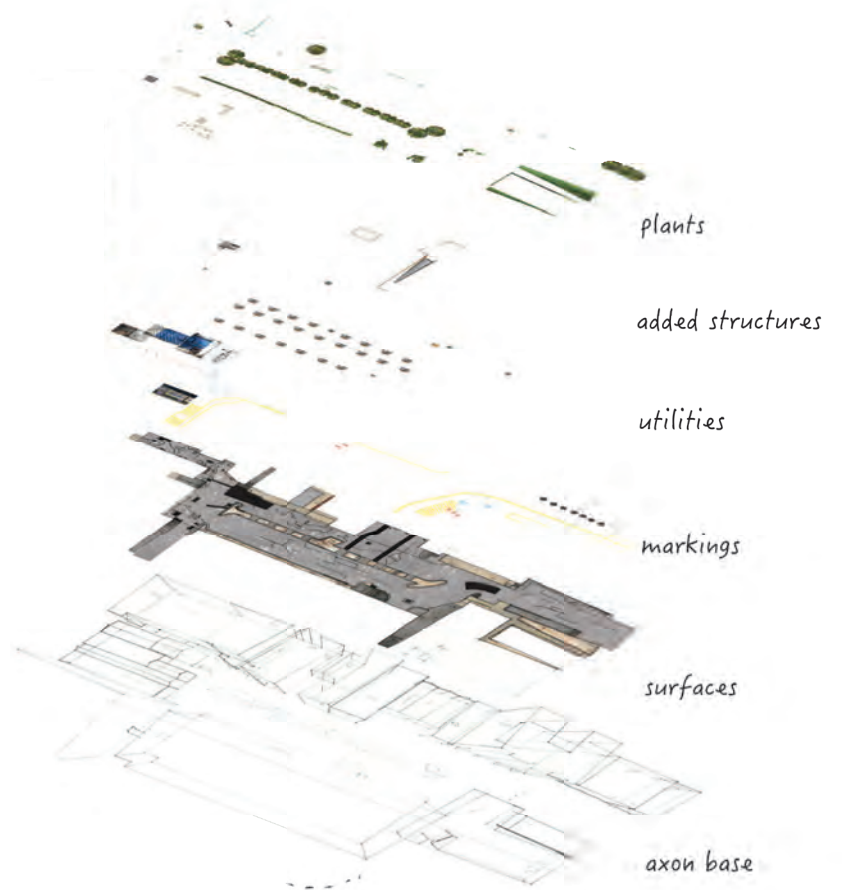
Looking into the marginalized conditions within Auburn's downtown core, I identified a series of spaces that met both the orientational and characteristic aspects of the margin. Inquiry into a connection between these sites did not prove fruitful, so I decided to move on and select a site. The site selected is at the center of downtown, surrounded completely by the main commercial corridor and given over mostly to parking.



character photographs of the site that helped inform the initial investigation



wrestling with the layers of landscape

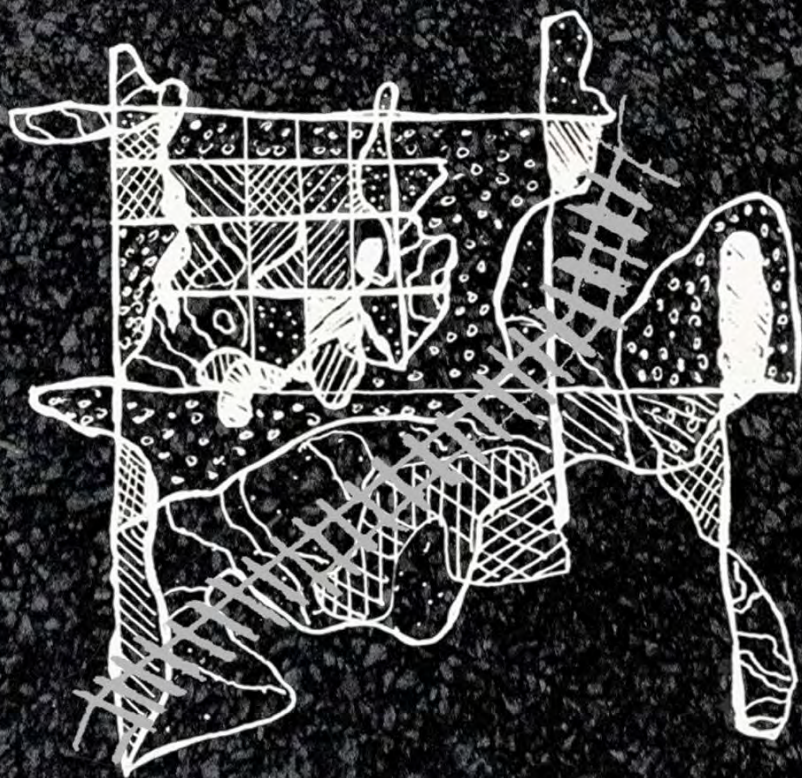




COLLISION

The surfaces covering the ground plane of contemporary urban conditions usually aim to provide structure for pedestrians and vehicles. Thus a clean and maintained aesthetic results from the mixture of hardscapes used in various urban conditions (streets, sidewalks, plazas, etc.).

However this system is undermined by the landscape in certain instances, which present themselves in the form of cracks or crumbles. These collisions are where the political force of the city meets the physical force of the landscape, where the nature of poured concrete meets the life of geofluidic soil. The impact zones of two forces tell the story of the environment of the city. In urban development, compaction of the subsoil provides greater stability for foundations of buildings and constructed surfaces; however, the landscape of the soil (though robbed of organic content) is still alive. Cars move rapidly over asphalt and into back alleys. Buildings settle and push on their foundations. And not only do these



urban tectonics take place, but there is even a poor but present soil ecology in these urban soils. Water, air and organisms form a macrocosm within the soil which is constantly conducting a grand exchange of nutrients and other matter. Even faced with the challenges of compaction and impervious ground cover, the soil continues to move and shape itself in the city.

In contemporary practices of constructing and maintaining the urban mainstream corridors (store fronts, streets, visible public realm), compaction and rigid forms act as stabilizers for the clean and neat city which struggles to force the dynamic landscape into a static, cultural mold. The ground and its inhabitants are now left trapped in a maze, only finding certain urban regions with enough margin to expand and flow out of the concrete labyrinth. The politics of the city and city making act as a force. Pavements and surfaces mark program and territory, representing the will of the city to construct a static space that freezes





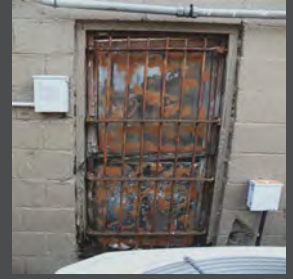
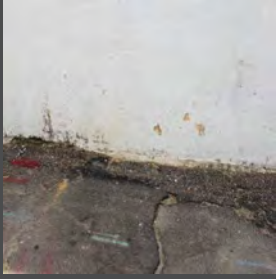
dynamic processes into a mediation for urban program. Collisions occur between the people and the expected cleanliness for cities, also highlighting the margin. For instance, in many back alleys and back of house spaces in urban areas, businesses accept deliveries, clean, dump, build, and dig. Cities work with pipes and lines beneath the surfaces, leaving scars and traces. These dirty processes inevitably collide with the city's idea of static, clean, organized urban space as best for the common good. These dynamic landscape processes act in breaking down any static structures which the city tries to impose, and with the diversity of forces comes the diversity of resulting trajectories which crack, snap, flow, and disintegrate.



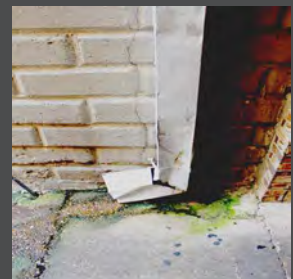
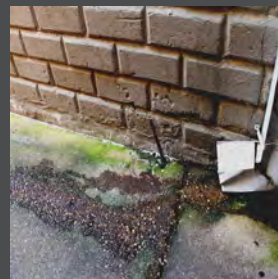
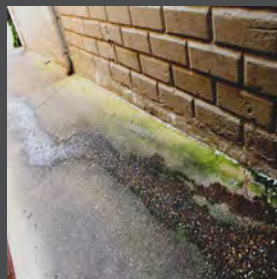
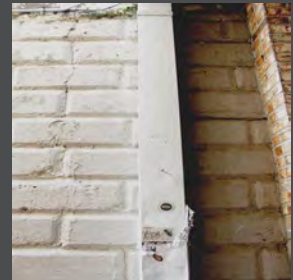
RESIDUE

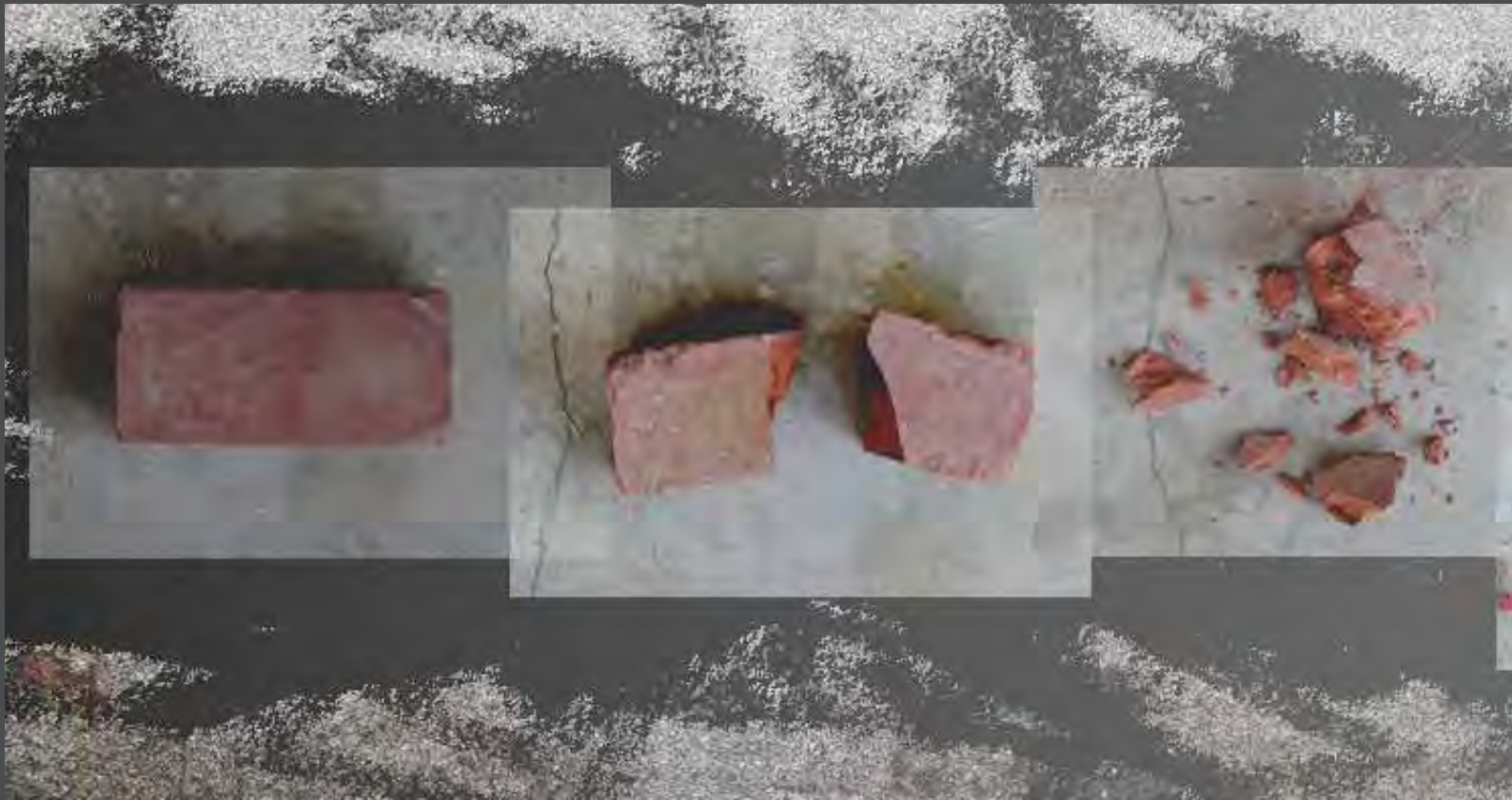
Visible traces on the city also come in the form of residues. These residues give presence to the invisible but active aspects of landscape by showing what they leave in their wake, whispering words left by the dance of wind, water, and the transience of other forces through the landscape.

Residues are quite prevalent within the margin. Just as collisions crack, residues build. Grease, rubble, dirt, seeds, and otherwise grime of the landscape act as a type of formless painting across the static canvases of structures. But how is the dirt different from the soil, and how is the green moss growing around the pipes distinct from the moss that grows in a flower bed? In his book *Subnature*, David Gissen writes that dirt is defined as "matter out of place."¹⁵ The residues that add such rich character of space all become more present in the urban margin because they are outcast there, banished from the identity of "the loveliest village."



The margin, however, embraces these elements of the commercial landscape. Cleaning, rainwater conduction, painting, construction, fumes, oils, and general weathering of materials are created and perpetuated by the marginalized landscape formed by the backs of commercial buildings. These processes add also to the ephemeral presencing of residues. Since these residues are formless, they have the potential to mark the beauty of everyday dirty processes, processes marginalized by contemporary city making. It could be said that residues affect the psychotopic qualities of landscape more so than establishing some sort of ecological equilibrium, but the two are inseparable. In the ecological activities that are the urban realm, particles and seeds play a role in the development of particular relationships between plants and





animal species as well as humans. Although these relationships might happen on the microcosmic level, we must not disconnect from them because a poor relation in scale.

The flavor of these residues has a psychological result as well. They form an attitude towards the political plasticity and acceptable activities within a space by presenting value. Usually residues, unframed, just seem like dirt and grime that indicates a certain apathy or marginalization of space; therefore, activities that normally don't happen within the eye of the mainstream city might take place amongst the residues.



Some kinds of globalizing mobilities might be best thought of as flows, when things physically move from one place to another and their path, even if convoluted or mediated, can somehow be mapped. Flows of people, commodities, carbon, and capital trace intricate global cartographies. So too birds, seeds, and viruses. And so too do continents in their grand drifts around the world (although they 'drift' only in geological time; in our historical time, their convulsive jerks are much more violent and disruptive). Flows also congeal, though they run in particular patterns, are halted at certain boundaries and are orchestrated from specific, bounded locations (flows of international capital, for example, depend on the social arrangements of very particular places for their mobility: the financial districts of certain world cities and offshore tax havens). Particular places will show their own specific symptoms of this dynamism which changes their geography, as flows impinge on what felt like more or less stable territories or disrupt yet again territories that felt like they should be stable.

Gillian Rose¹⁶



TERRITORY

Who and what occupy the city? This is the question at the root of understanding the true meaning of democratic, public space. The traditional city structure uses an array of techniques to represent boundaries, territory, ownership, and for good reason. This allow the city to function efficiently in its day to day behavior, but the formation of these territories is undoubtedly political.

In the commercial mainstream, the choreography of landscape is structured by walls, lines, zones, surfaces, and other physical or visual cues that clearly communicate the preferred order and use of space. In essence, there is a hierarchy. However, this hierarchy is more fuzzy in the urban margin. In these spaces, automobiles, humans, flows, other animals, and vegetation live and





function in a zone with a less designed structure, often leading to competition amongst forces in the landscape and a high rate of disturbance. But this competition and negotiable landscape also shares a side of collaboration and emerging novel, collective ecologies.

Within these sites now exists the opportunity to expand on this unique condition regarding the ownership or choreography of space. The act of claiming public space is often clearly signaled through design vernacular, creating an experience that is highly mediated through design implementations. But in the terrain vague of the margin, the gumption of claiming public space leaves open ended, democratic solutions to the occupation of space. This is translated through a host of landscape features: smoking chairs, gates, plants growing in cracks, loading zones, moments of rest, and moments of movement).

To begin with, we claim that there is a need to profoundly rethink citizenship in contemporary society. Active citizenship begins with the recognition that the public realm is a political and physical terrain of struggle that is produced contextually, relationally, and through dialogue; that is incrementally negotiated over time through democratic participation; and that is manifested in material form. Physical spaces are a major component of the creative commons that reflects civil society's values. Material spaces reveal hidden social ecologies, express identities, and offer a means for deeper self-understanding.





MEDIA

The word media has the same root as the word mediation. In essence, media is that which conveys information or emotion. Within our cities lies a vast media ecosystem. Typical urban media might include: parking signs, traffic paint, historic markers, business signs, advertisements, mobile apps, wifi, and place-making media. And while most of these installations are very formal, some of the place-making media in our urban conditions is very informal, like graffiti or urban art. While the voices of collisions, residues, and territories must be carefully distinguished, media is the most literal and concrete subversive presence in the urban landscape.

This investigation focuses closer on public art, however, to highlight the distinction of public art in the commercial mainstream versus in the margin. And ultimately, the distinguishing difference between the mainstream and marginal urban art is the presence of accountability. Antonio Lopez says it best:

“The media economy works on the principle that if it’s free, you’re the product. What we watch, pay attention to, or create online is sold to marketers. Without our active response via our attention, media products have no value. Thus, the key to the media economy is how “affect” moves through people. In the one-to-many system of industrial, top-down media production, affect is measured by circulation, audience ratings, and sales. In such a system there is very low feedback between consumers and producers, but feedback exists. In the current many-to-many system empowered by social networks on the internet, media affect is measured by what we share and whom we share it with. Whether or not that activity gets commodified depends on the kind of media ecosystems we engage. From a dystopian perspective, though social media enable greater feedback, we inadvertently commodify ourselves by allowing companies to profit from our interests and relationships. From a utopian perspective, we become a web through which planetary consciousness can weave itself. The difference between the two means disentangling the prerogatives of the world system from this web and engaging in green cultural citizenship.”¹⁸

This distinction brings to light the paradox of urban public space. Where the commercial store fronts, streets, and even parks are considered the most democratic and public of spaces, they are designed (through the collective accountability of the majority) to only incorporate safe, pleasant features that are “safe for the whole family.” But by the very nature of this design intent, the political curation of public space undermines the integrity of democracy, collaboration, and negotiation.

For public art that lies in the margin, only two forms of accountability exist: the risk of getting caught by local authorities (presumably for solicitation or not having permission to “deface” private property) and the standards of craft that get passed down from generation to generation through traditions such as graffiti, tagging, mural making, street dance, street-corner music, and poster display. These indigenous forms of art have lived and grown under marginalized conditions, and therefore make a direct connection between the presence of the margin and a valuable tradition in the life and history of cities. And within these spaces and traditions, the temporality of art is appreciated as these public pieces become layered, and the essence of dialogue is explored through the informal curation of what art stays and what art goes. While this form of dialogue might be seen as contentious, it is the only means of having a feedback relationship with the sharing of media and ideas between people and forces within the urban realm.



Solo

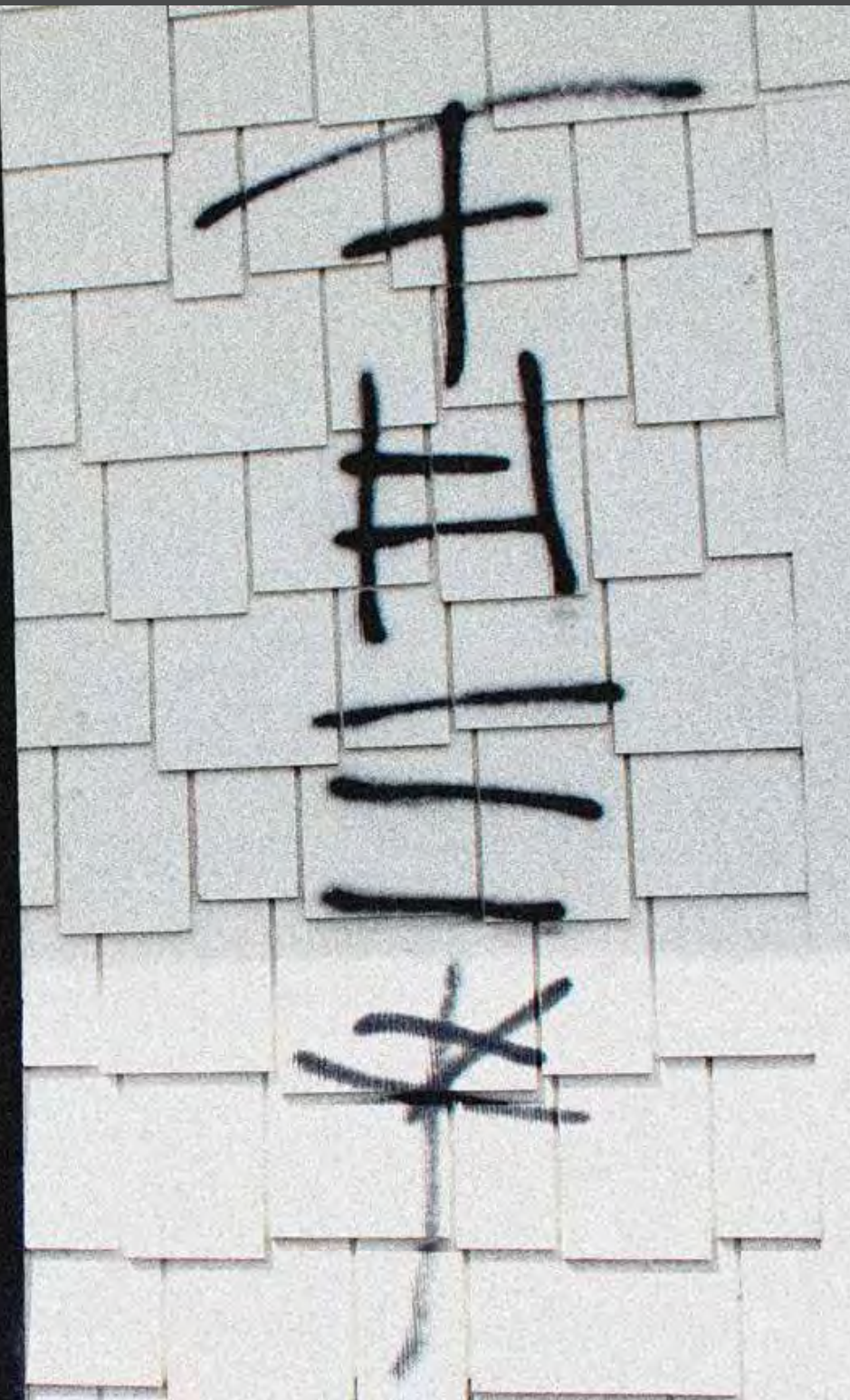
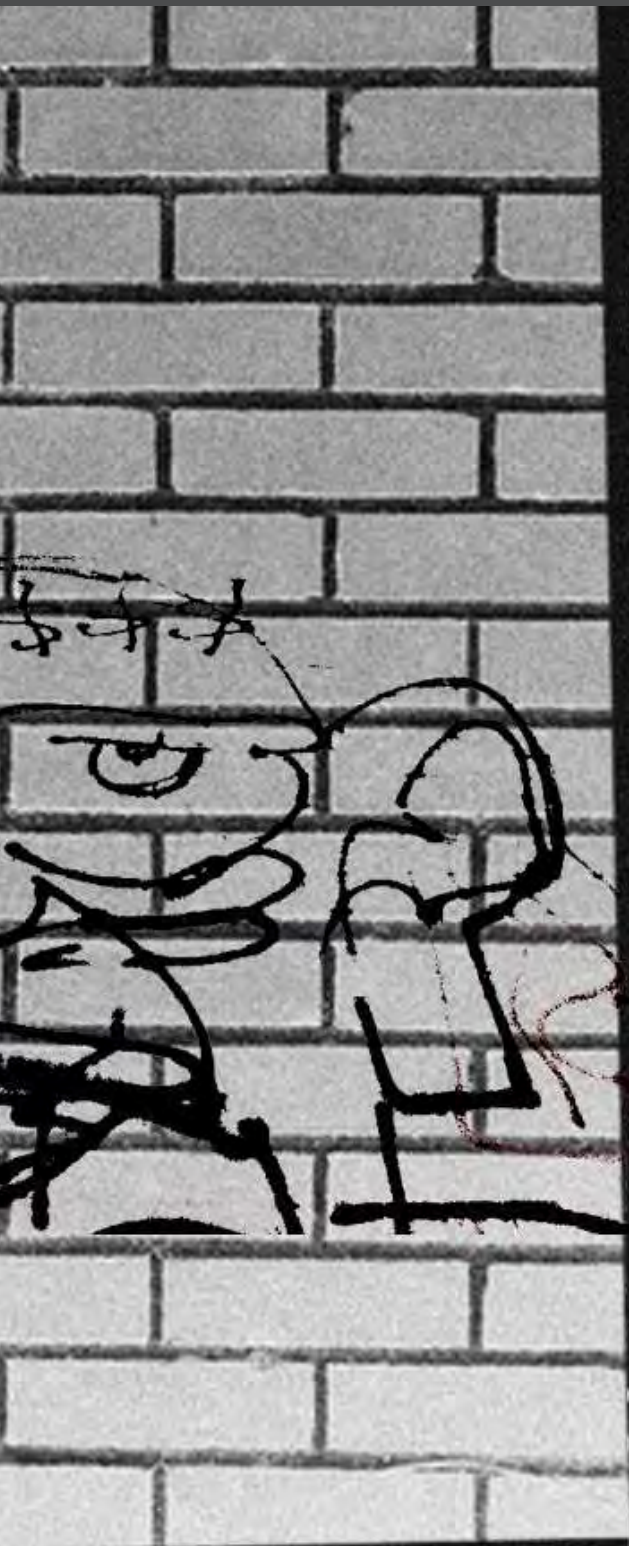
Dope

BUSH

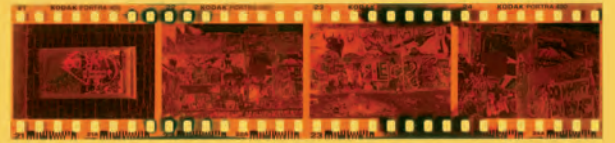
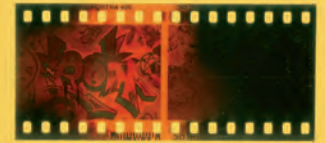


bam.



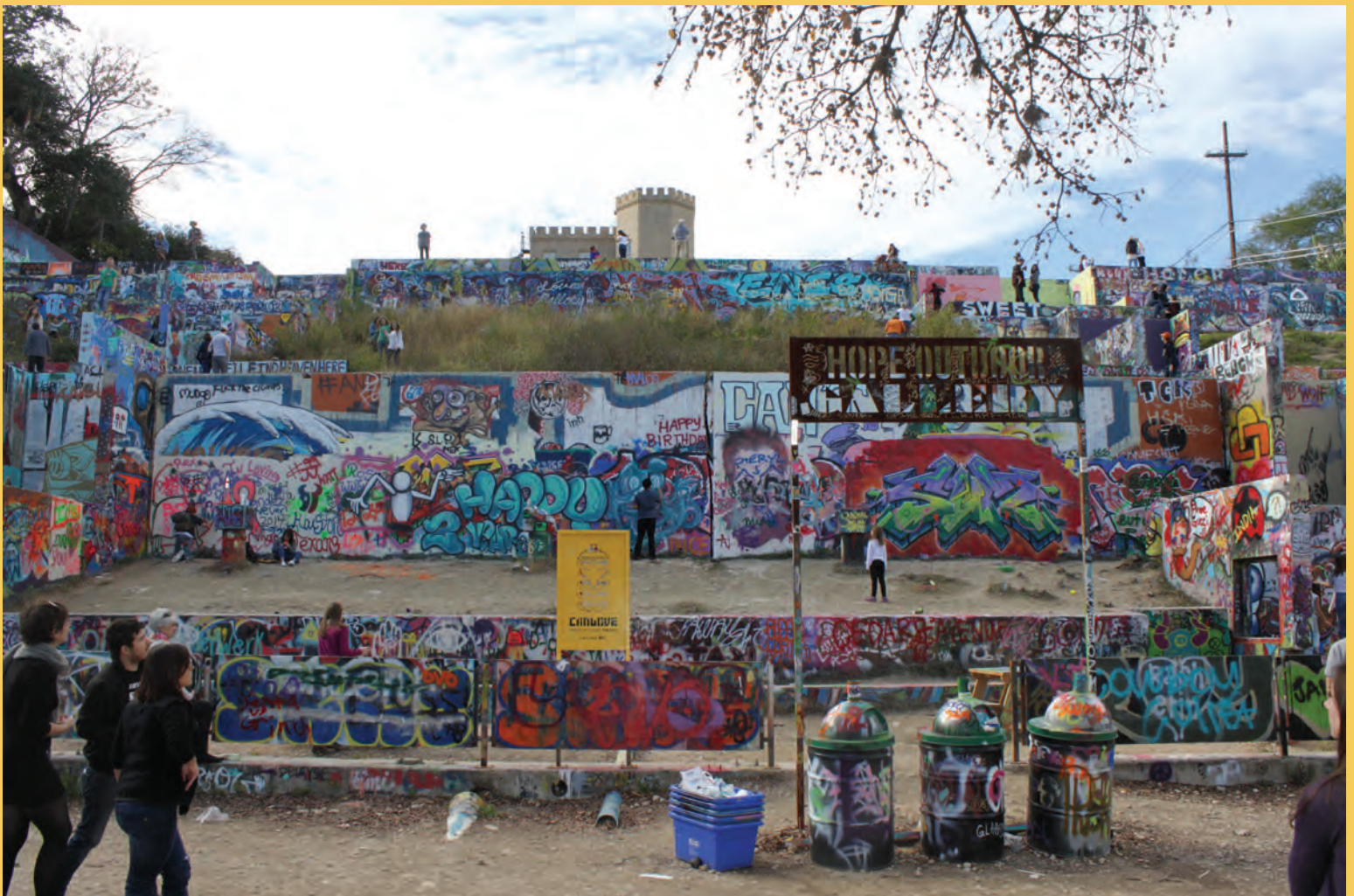


HOPE OUTDOOR GALLERY



HOPE OUTDOOR GALLERY IS A PUBLIC, OUTDOOR GRAFFITI GALLERY LOCATED JUST ON THE WEST SIDE OF DOWNTOWN AUSTIN, TEXAS. THE PARK IS OPEN TO ANY ARTIST WHO WISHES TO COME AND DISPLAY THEIR TALENT OR LET THEIR VOICE BE HEARD. ALTHOUGH THIS SEEMS LIKE A RECIPE FOR DISASTER, THE CRAFT OF THE ART ON THE WALLS IS HIGH FOR THE MOST PART. THERE ARE SOME INSTANCES OF BEAUTIFUL MURALS COVERED WITH THE CARELESSLY SPRAYED TAG. THIS, HOWEVER IS THE NATURE OF THE PROCESS TOWARDS A DEMOCRATIC

SOLUTION. THE PARK NOW HAS A SIGN ASKING PATRONS AND OTHER ARTISTS NOT TO SPRAY OVER ANY WORK THAT THEY DON'T THINK THEY CAN APPROVE UPON. (A.K.A. THE SIGN SAYS "STOP SPRAYPAINTING BULLSHIT OVER THE MURALS!")





TESTING THROUGH DESIGN

WHAT IS DESIGN RESEARCH

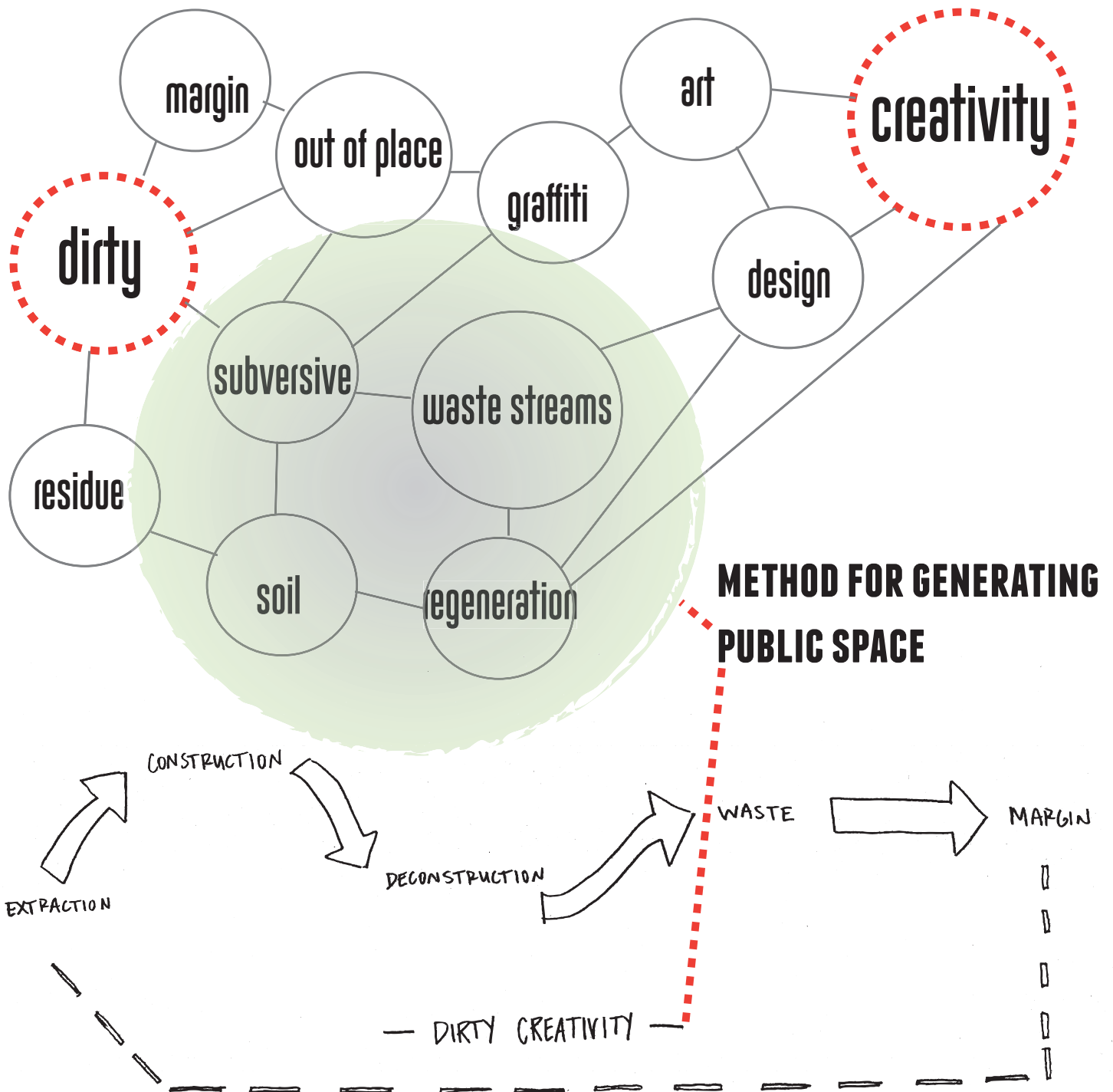
Now that the scope of the project, the supporting theory, and the methodology for investigation (as well as results) are laid out, all of these things must now be applied to the field of design research. The process has been started already through constructing a vocabulary around the findings of the interrogation of the margin. However, design research is more. Design research is an iterative process of testing hypotheses and running projections in through a landscape by the process of design. It's a constant dialogue of questions proposed through design and answers given through the iterative struggle of those designs. This process for this investigation began with small models, prototypes, and experiments to help gain familiarity with the elements and principles of design selected to carry out the design goals. The investigation then evolved into more developed, site specific design strategies. All of this to answer the question:

HOW CAN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE ADDRESS THE DESIGN OF MARGINALIZED URBAN SPACES WITHOUT THE TRADITIONAL METHODS OF ERASING EXPRESSIVE, SUBVERSIVE ELEMENTS?



DIRTY CREATIVITY & PROTOTYPES

The primordial form the proposed strategy came through the construction of a process I penned as dirty creativity. It began as a word mapping exercise, trying to find the links between several conditions of landscape that had already been defined for the urban margin. The goal of creating these links was to try to tease out strategic ideas for the formation of designed public space. The process



of dirty creativity is defined as a process of generating space and place through the designed celebration and engagement with subversive elements within the landscape. These dirty things were merely reevaluated by informing context and framing value through design. Although in it's conception, how this processes fleshed out through design was still nebulous.

The first design prototype to evolve from sketch to model was primarily a response to cues given by the nature of collision and that of media. The interpretation of collision began with the exposure of the dynamic soil underneath the urban hardscapes. The result of geofluidic disturbances in the surfaces guided the investigation into looking at the composition of the soil. Knowing that there was a compact subgrade, usually formed by gravel, underneath the surfaces, I focused my attention on the possibility of introducing organic content and porosity back into the soil. This would allow the soil to not only express itself, but it would reveal the results of seeds and species that occupy the urban condition. The model represents the form of a digestive stomach. Basically new organic input would be placed in the top of the stomach, and as the different microorganisms digest the content, the organic matter moves down the mesh stomach and out through the bottom of the structure. The mesh is designed to both allow for air exchange and to reveal the species of fungus that help digest the wast to form compost. When exposed to these permeable barriers, the fruiting bodies of fungi grown and reach beyond the mesh. The installation also doubles as canvas space, by providing a desirably textured and sized surface for public art.







From here, I began to expand in the direction of soil, running two more experiments. The first experiment tested the idea of using a small amount of compost from an un-matured compost heap (still containing all the digestive microorganisms) to start the process of digestion for a controlled and isolated compost heap. The experiment took place in a 10 gallon terrarium filled with a mixture of potting soil, leaf litter, un-matured compost (from home) and a regular source of water through a drip system. The tank was slightly exposed to a northern facing window, but was out of the way of direct light in order to regulate fungal growth and hydric conditions. The experiment resulted in a continuation of the composting process with the consistent input of new organic waste. At first, certain fungal and bacterial species dominated the tank, but as time played on, these populations settled and balanced, until the composting process resumed.

The last mini experiment conducted regarding soil was inspired by reading the book *Mycelium Running* by so and so. This book explained the complex role of fungi in soil ecology as well as their amazing ability to remediate contaminated soil. It was from here that the presence of cultivated fungal species was incorporated into the project as it is appropriate to both the creation and the maintenance of organically rich soil. So the experiment aimed at propagating and growing mycelium (fungal root-like system) on cardboard to see how difficult the process was. A layer of cardboard was laid over mycelium rich bark which was then covered with organically rich, moist soil. This soil was kept moist, dark, and undisturbed for about 45 days before the cardboard was removed. This experiment also proved to be a success with the cardboard revealing the inoculation of tiny fuzzy fungal mycelia.





THE MOTHER CULTURE

With these experiments done, the process of developing a design strategy pushed forward, and at this point, the following associations had been made regarding the different voices identified and described previously and how they could inform design outcomes.

Collision had taken a more developed meaning as the design response was both two fold: to frame the dynamism and patchwork of surfaces within the site and to expose soil for the purpose of organic content in public space. The reason for incorporating organic soil purposefully back into the margin will become clearer in light of the other voices.

Residue, along with collision, brings into the light the presence of “matter out of place” in these urban margins, and combined the two voices grow stronger. Where residue describes the grime and growth associated with these landscapes, the presence of organic soil perpetuates this life. Soil allows for passing seeds to take hold in the ground, germinate, and claim their own territory within the landscape. Also the remediative properties of mycelial rich soil accommodated the grungy processes of cleaning on a day to day basis without removing it or detracting from its character upon the landscape.

Territory at this point in the project was responded to with a clearer intention at this point in the project. Now with a basis for the life of the site and the goals of collision and residue, territory became less about specific spaces set aside for specific and regimented uses and more about opening the democratic dialogue of public space formation by a collective of landscape elements. Here the idea of spatiality evolved from program to choreography. No longer would social, productive, and vegetative surfaces be separated and distinguished, but all aspects of the site would self-mold into territories that changed throughout the day, week, year. The strategy for this goal is mainly to reinterpret the site as a matrix of space instead of an agglomeration of isolated or distinctly programmed space. The balance of framing character rich elements of space and leaving an open-ended system for the inhabitants of the landscape to claim territory for themselves became important.

The nature of public art within the margin as a specific kind of media seems antithetical to the nature of design. But, so far, the discussion has turned from strategies of traditional, top-down design into strategies of correct investment. As far as media is concerned for these sites, graffiti and other forms of informal

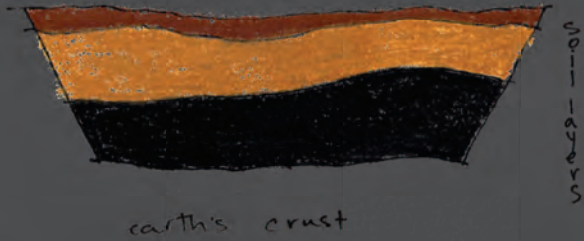
As far as media is concerned for these sites, graffiti and other forms of informal art mark the investment of one artist upon the site. In evaluating graffiti art, one element that distinguishes craft is the location or placement of the art. Therefore, the media within these sights are not the result of imposed design decisions, but are the mark of activation and investment by inhabitants upon the space. With this being established, the strategy for exploring the incorporation of this artistic tradition within the site turned towards making initial investments, namely to open the site to local artists.

With clearer goals framed, the over-all strategy for the site became more holistic as the vision for the site evolved into en-culturing the landscape with a framed but open-ended system for these rich, subversive elements to shine. And not only this, but these elements or inhabitants would democratically shape the public space itself.

These ideas reminded me of the concept of a “mother culture.” In ancient traditions of fermenting food and beverages, bacteria and fungi are used to convert sugar into alcohol. This is done through the introduction of a mother culture. For instance, kefir (fermented milk) goes through the fermentation process through the introduction of lactobacillus, a bacteria that converts lactose into alcohol. This is done by introducing grains (clumps of the bacteria that grow in community) into the milk which then grow and metabolize the lactose. This process became an inspirational metaphor at this point in the investigation. What if these marginalized sites could be engrained with a mother culture, meaning that the site would hold all the necessary ingredients for self development according to the life acted out within the space? This mother culture represented the initial investment and the continued development of the site, starting with a stockpile of elements that contained cultural significance for a collective of species.

The starting point for this vision seemed a fundamental task and was formulated into a question: how is organic urban soil created in situ? Investigation began and a strategy was constructed based on previous experiments and new research into the creation of soil.

SOIL: AN OVERVIEW¹⁹



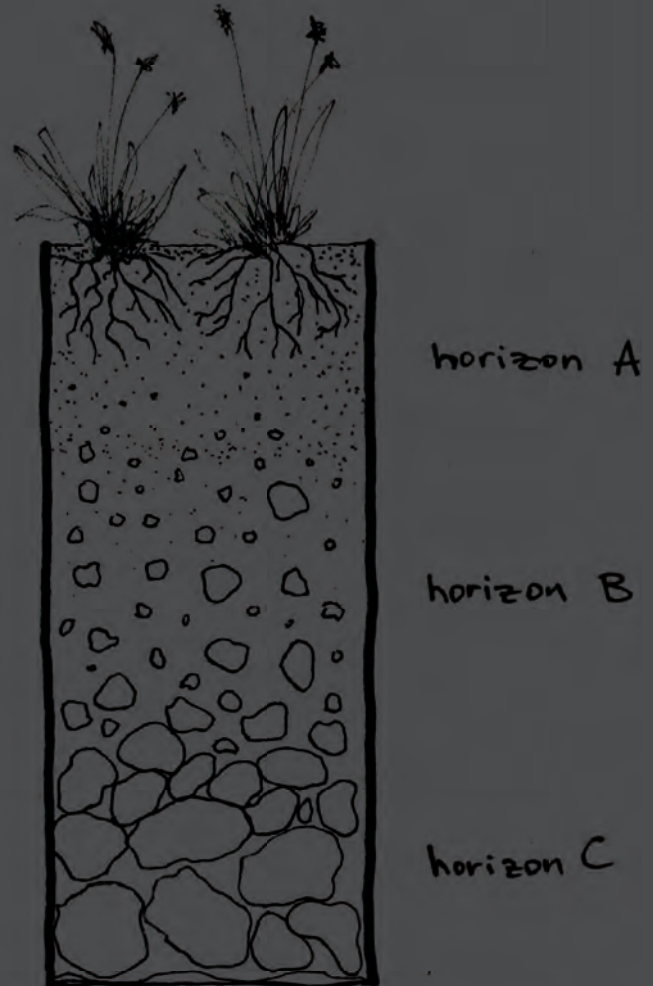
The outer surface of the earth is called the crust. The base of this crust is composed of compacted mineral, of which there are many types. This mineral base is known as the "parent material." Soil is formed based on parent material, topography, climate, living organisms, and time.

The type of parent material determines the mineral content of soil. This happens through a process by which the parent material becomes weathered and breaks down into finer and finer particulate matter. This eventually forms a gradient within the soil known as soil horizons.

A- topsoil: upper most layer of soil containing the finest of mineral grains, organic matter, air, water, living organisms and subsequent excreted nutrients

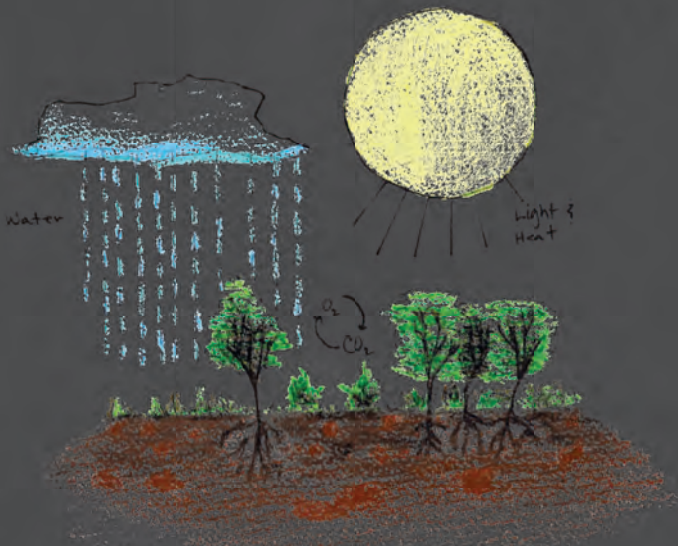
B- subsoil: a lower layer of soil with larger particles of mineral and vastly decreased organic content from the topsoil. this layer acts as an important reserve for water and nutrients along with providing structure for plant roots to take hold.

C- parent material: large chunks of mineral that initially form the base for soil as it is exposed upward to water, air, and organic detritus.

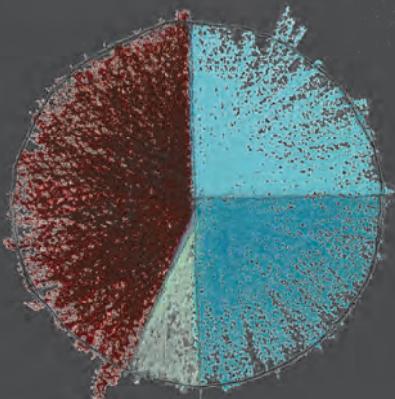




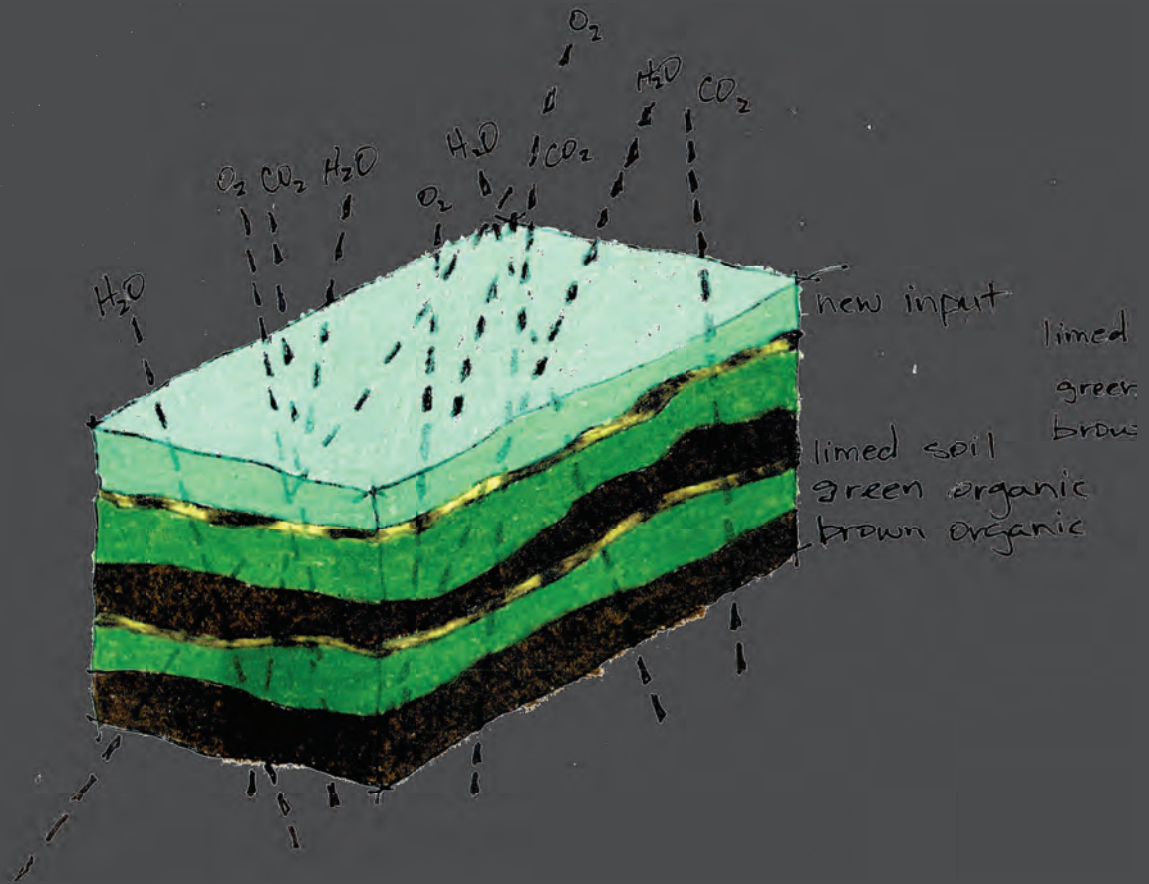
The process of weathering the mineral material happens on a physical, chemical and biological level. Physically the mineral breaks into smaller sizes. Chemical and biological weathering of mineral happens through slow acidification caused by two processes: the loss of hydronium ions from water (H^+) from water and the low pH of secreted waste from introductory cultures of fungus and algae. This weathering releases nutrients into the soil that can become soluble or insoluble to plants based on pH.



In order for soil to become organically viable, it must have the right conditions: air, water, and light. The hydrologic cycle is critical to soil formation for it aids in the weathering process as well as supports the vital systems of all the microorganisms at home in the soil. Part of these requirements for air and water have to do with soil porosity (or the makeup of space within soil and its composition). Soil should be around 50% pore space and 50% solids. Out of the 50% solids, organic content should make up about 5%.



The richness of soil horizons and the efficiency in soil production are directly linked. As the ecology of the soil becomes more diverse and populous, organic breakdown increases. Organic breakdown can easily be seen through the process of making compost.



The use of composting for organic breakdown is a balancing act of chemical ratios that support a specific microbial cultures within the heap. The constituent parts are brown matter (dead plant material, dried, rich in carbon), green matter (fresh organic waste, high in nitrogen) water, and air. In combination with disturbance (mixing) and correct pH balancing, green organic waste is decomposed into a substance called humus, made up of the particulate decomposed remnants of organic matter. Composting represents an isolated view of a larger process that takes place within the soil along with all the other processes simultaneously. With the correct parameters set up, a rich soil ecology will inhabit the soil.

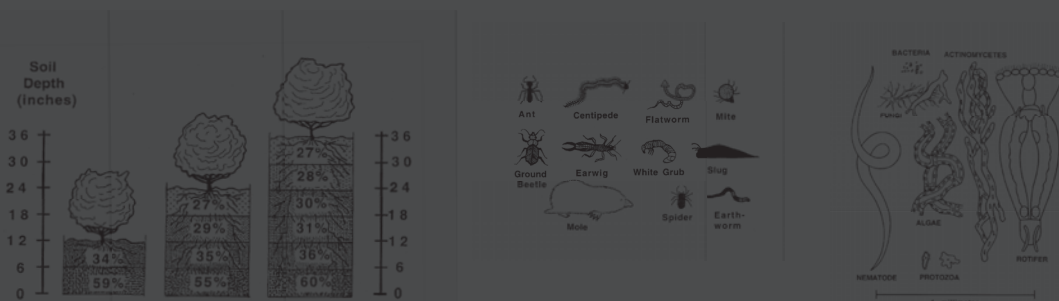
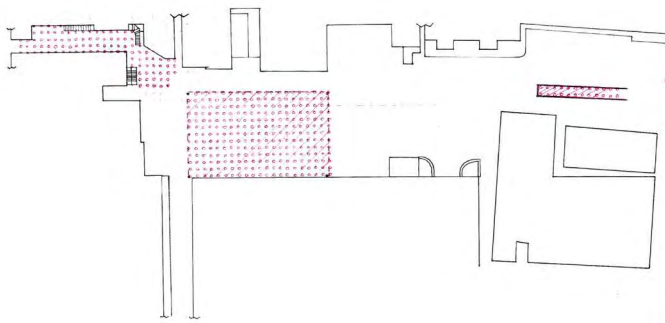
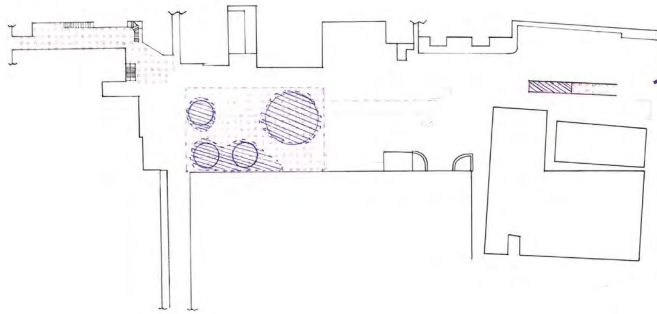


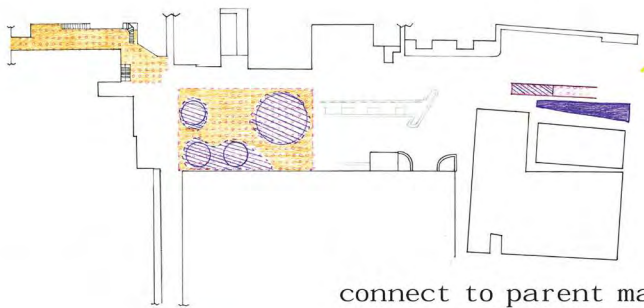
Figure 4.8 Soil depth determines amount of water held (Agriculture by Harris R. W., 1983. Reprinted by permission of Prentice-Hall, Inc., Upper Saddle River, NJ.)



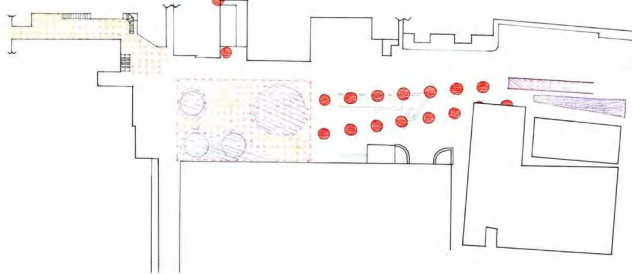
asphalt removal
 subgrade exposure
 asphalt reuse



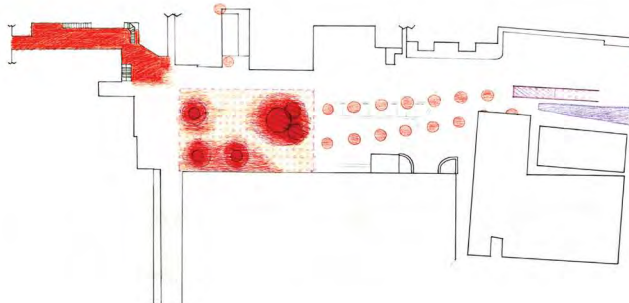
partial gravel removal
 stacked for acification
 parent compost
 parent mineral clay
 parent myselia



acidification

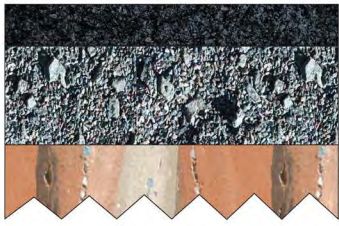


connect to parent material
 create clay and topsoil
 connect to waste streams

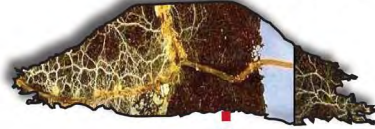


waste streams creates new economy
 soil remediation creates new space

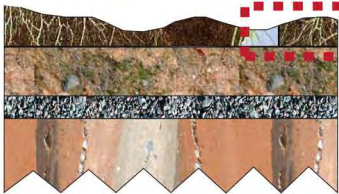
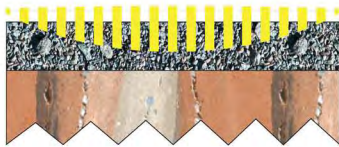




mushroom garden



asphalt reuse



mycorestoration

decomposition: fungi, algae, and bacteria are responsible for most of organic decomposition

reduction: mycelia also have the ability to break down large, inorganic and organic compounds that might be toxic to other organisms

concentration: for other elements (such as heavy metals) that cannot be broken down further, mushrooms concentrate them in their fruiting bodies

compost



SOIL REMEDIATION AND PLACE MAKING

WASTE STREAMS & CYCLES

From here, the idea of mother culture took off with the incorporation of indigenous waste streams within the site. These include organic wastes such as food and paper and material waste such as shipping palettes and glass. Could these waste streams create the mother culture of this place which in turn would inform the arrangement of public space? YES! In chapters past, the notion of marginalized communities and the stock of wonderful artists and makers within Auburn was discussed. This creative culture combined with the material expression of the site would build the program of the mother culture, which would not only sustain itself, but become a productive aspect within the landscape. Waste would be recreated into new processes and structures. Soil could be exported off site as the mother culture continues to create more and more soil. And as this culture is solidified and investments are made in the creation of space (spontaneous vegetation, art, social gathering, continuation of dirty processes) the framed elements of site begin to express their full potential.

organic vegetable



organic meat



cardboard



glass

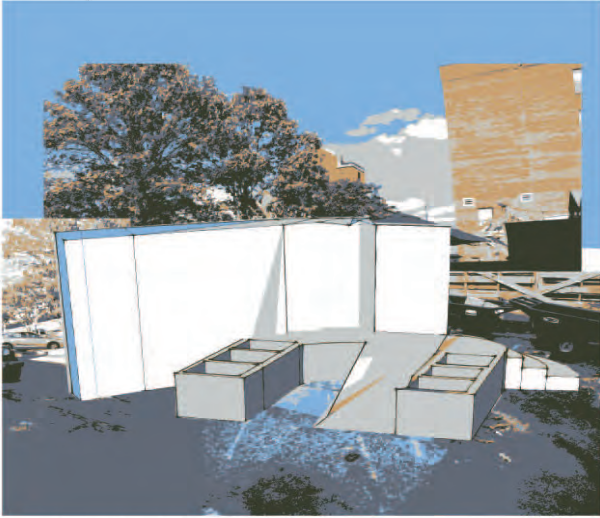


paper



pallets

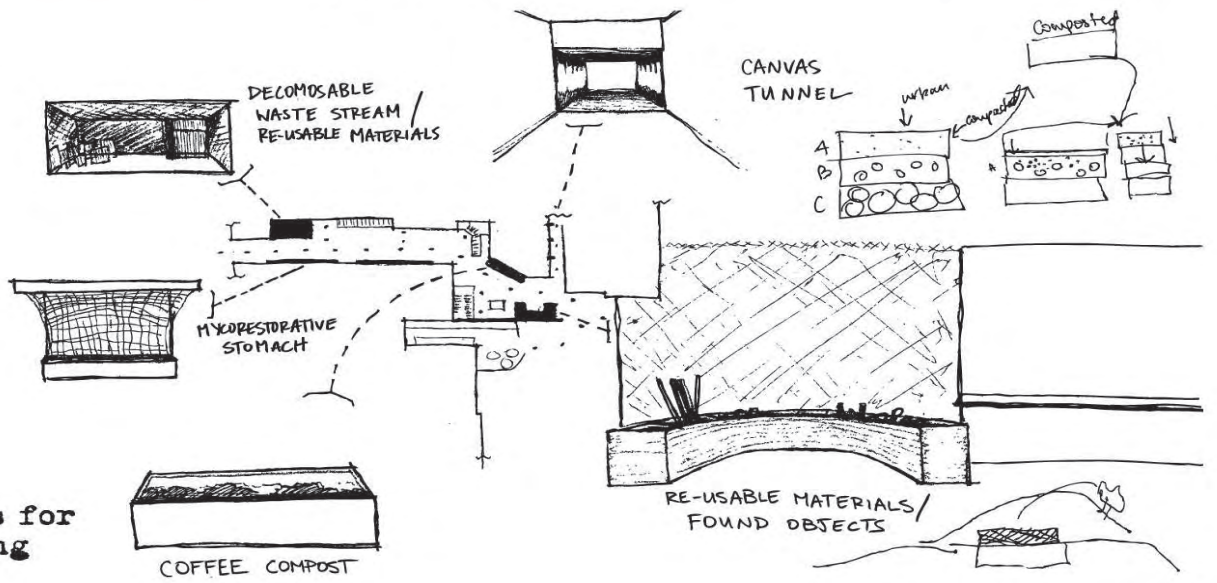
/ week



installations



public furniture



beginning ideas for reuse programing

early iterations of design for waste stream incorporation

TICHENOR AVENUE

1

2

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11

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33 32 31 30

29

34

6 6 660

37

COLLEGE STREET

MAGNOLIA STREET

26

27



- 1 cheeburger cheeburger
- 2 Half-time Bar and Grill
- 3 Big Dog Running Co.
- 4 Arigato
- 5 Starz and Auburn Spa
- 6 Tacorita
- 7 Bizilia's cafe
- 8 Gigi's Cupcakes
- 9 Flowersmith's Floral
- 10 Mellow Mushroom
- 11 Jimmy John's sandwiches
- 12 The Pink Room (shoes)
- 13 Big Blue Bagel
- 14 Elle's Boutique
- 15 Wrapsody
- 16 Avondale's Bar
- 17 Auburn Barber shop
- 18 Luxury Spa
- 19 Auburn Art
- 20 Toomer's Drug store
- 21 Cell phone repair
- 22 Auburn Hardware
- 23 Moe's BBQ
- 24 The Locker Room (clothes)
- 25 Little Italy Pizzeria
- 26 Offices
- 27 Southern Trails (outdoor)
- 28 Hudson Building
- 29 Auburn City Hall
- 30 COA Human Resources
- 31 508 Architects
- 32 The coffee cat
- 33 COA Health and wellness
- 34 The Hound (restaurant/bar)

SITE

wastestreams

80 lbs/day



ADMINISTRATIVE



4/wk

PALETTES



150 lbs/day

GREEN



MEAT



65 lbs/day

The model constructed was used as an iterative tool upon which design strategies could be layered and played out. Design elements included exposure of soil to house the mother culture and create a certain dynamic and home for inhabitants of the space. Some surfaces were kept in their messiness while others were removed for this process. The idea of grass pavers is represented through the wire mesh that covers a portion of the soil. The intent behind this move was to create a structural surface for automobiles that still allowed for the soil to breathe and plants to take hold. However, on the model this interpreted into a "one surface fits all" solution without giving thought to how the existing surfaces might shape public space and character and without understanding the microclimate that affect vegetative growth and process.

To frame the alley space, stretched wires with lights were used to enclose the space and illuminate it, highlighting the rich character of place. The density of wires provides a datum across the site which inform different types of space. North of the alley, the wires create an oculus into the sky, hinting at a gathering space and creating a microclimactic conditions for growth. Over the exposed soil, the wires provide structure for a weaved geotextile which would provide two things for the mother culture: controlled amounts of UV rays and shade for water retention. The form of the weaved covering is informed by two main elements: the sun path across the site throughout the day and the matrix of support wires stretched in between existing infrastructure.

SHADOW STUDY



7:30 AM



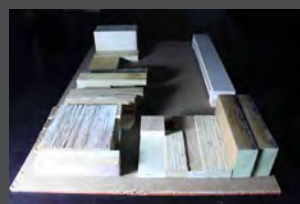
10:00 AM



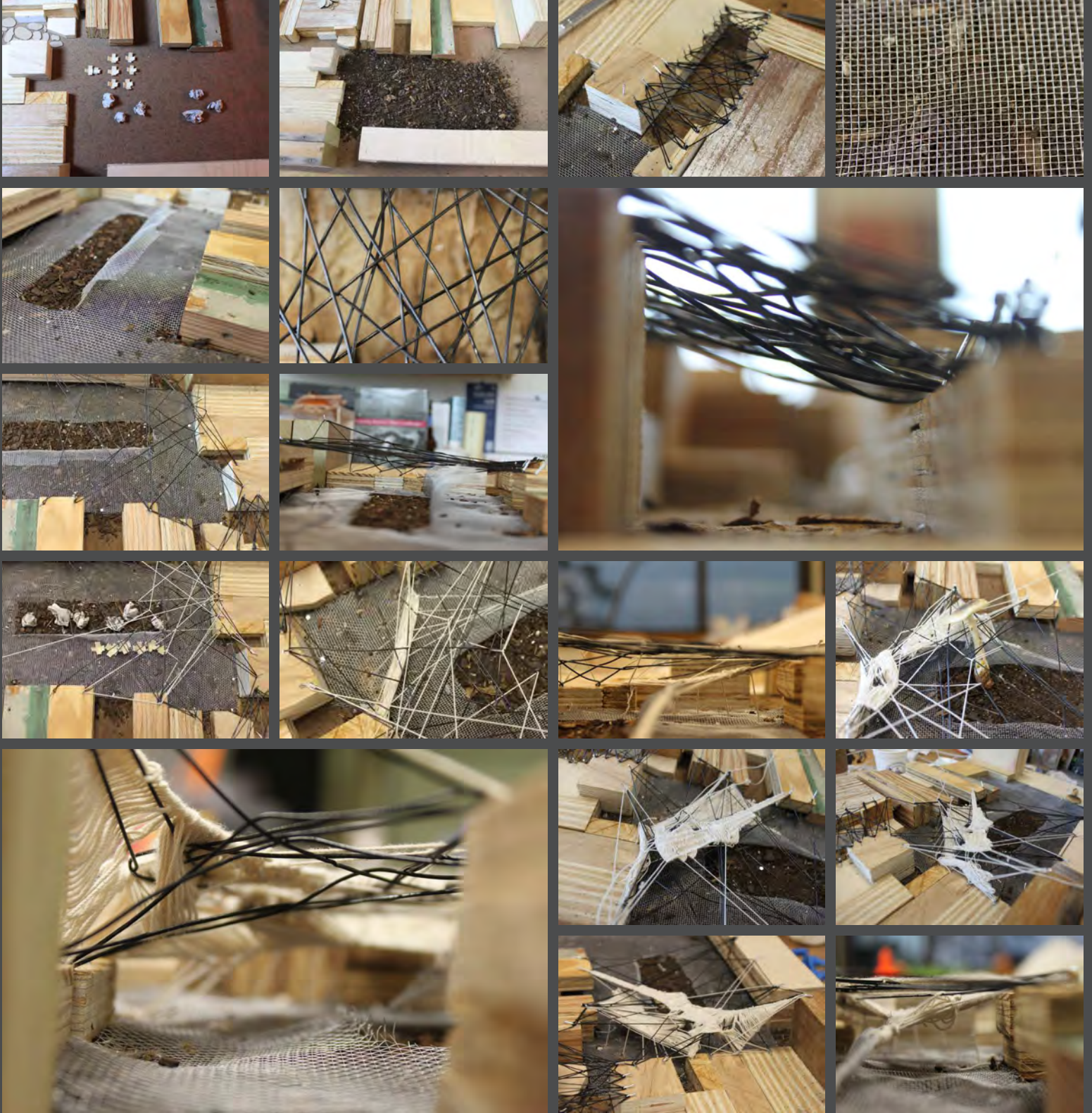
12:00 PM



3:00 PM



6:30 PM





With exposed soil in the landscape, a host of biodiversity settles into the soil. Different microconditions across the site will affect the succession of species that occupy it, creating different characters of space that can be responded to appropriately.



plan
1:10 N 1







REFLECTIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In landscape architecture, new theories are blossoming that are shifting the way that designers approach landscape, and some of these theories are captured here in this project. The next evolution of this design investigation would be to more closely situate the specific cycles and people that make this landscape function in a productive way. How can informal design or lay design inform public space through the reuse of materials? Are there sociological parameters that are overlooked through this material investigation? What novel ecologies are generated from this method of design strategy? The greatest asset of this project is the potential for discovery and creation that gets richer and richer the deeper you dive in.

During the formulation of this book and throughout the entire investigation process, I had tons of support and help. Thanks to my parents for always supporting me and helping me get back on track when I derail. Thanks to David Hill who was my studio professor and mentor during this investigation. His tenacity and insightfulness have greatly impacted the success of this project. Thanks to all the friends who provided me emotional support during this year, especially my two cats Mary Jane and Hecate. Thanks to my studio colleagues for giving me insightful feedback and for keeping me somewhat sane in studio. Thanks to Rod Barnett for initial guidance in starting this project. And thanks to the Auburn University Masters in Landscape Architecture program for kicking my ass. Now it's time to sleep.

SOURCE MATERIAL

1. Barnett, 1
 2. Barnett, 3
 3. Richardson
 4. "
 5. "
 6. Godfrey, 46
 7. Richards
 8. Latour
 9. Hirsch,
O'Hanlon, 136-38
 10. "
 11. "
 12. See
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 13. Latour
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Bureau
 15. Gissen
 16. Smout, Allen
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 17. Aeschbacher
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