In January, 2008 a group of Kent State architecture and urban design students from the CUDC traveled to Detroit to participate in a design charrette that was facilitated by the Contemporary Art Institute of Detroit (CAID) and its director Aaron Timlin and board chair Amy Deines. In Detroit, art organizations such as CAID play a very important role; as the city has become known for how art and its production can be colonizing forces in “shrinking,” post-industrial cities.

The students were tasked with the production of strategies to best utilize the large number of vacant parcels surrounding the CAID gallery. There are many forces at work on the site, including adjacent influences by academic and institutional organizations and a nearby historical district. The area around the gallery is not completely bare. The neighborhood is sprinkled with houses, churches, and a few light industrial buildings. Many of these structures have been abandoned and some have fallen victim to arson—a common fate for abandoned structures in Detroit. At the same time, there are enclaves of well maintained houses. These conditions forced the students to think strategically about the implementation of their projects and how new uses would interact with the current inhabitants.

The work was produced over a two day period at the CAID gallery, allowing the students to spend time in the neighborhood. The students also spoke with residents, city officials and engaged a range of resources from the University of Detroit Mercy. After the work was completed, a public forum was held to allow the students to present the work. Residents, designers, city officials, academics, artists and a myriad of other individuals attended the presentations, which were followed by a panel discussion and a public reception.

Sean Burkholder, Steve Rugare and Paul Vernon (charrette advisors)
Existing conditions. The large building at the southern end of the photo is a high school. A large lot used to store school buses is not far from CAID, which is housed in an old hardware store. Not too far to the east is Wayne State University and (near the campus) a more in-tact area of housing.

Aaron Beach, Ben Gingrich and Angela Jayjack based their project for the “CAID Urban Exhibition Park” (bottom of this and facing pages) around the need to clean up burned out buildings and illegally dumped bulk materials in the neighborhood (see aerial). Instead of removing the debris, they proposed capping it on site, creating a unique artificial topography for recreation and outdoor art installations.
In “Change Machine” (above and next page) Evan Engelmann, Austin Kotting, Chris Rood and ...propose maximum flexibility, including an enhanced utility infrastructure that will allow for the installation of modular artist cottages and studio spaces.
“Insert Link Here” emphasizes connections between the site and surrounding institutions and amenities. After careful study of the existing pedestrian network, Scott Clifford, Lauren Johnson and Eric Philips developed a network of thematic paths that would both extend CAID’s mission into the neighborhood and stimulate activity on the streets. They also proposed that CAID sponsor a competition, challenging artists and designers to produce different solar powered lighting fixtures for each path.
The “Northwest Triangle” project by Scott Alleman, Alyssa Binsley and Luke Visnic includes two main elements. Taking advantage of easy freeway access to the area, they propose a cut-your-own Christmas tree farm.
The other major element of the Northwest Triangle project is a linear park along a rail line, with neighboring institutions taking “ownership” of sections of the park to create a continuous outdoor event and exhibition space.

Installing the work at CAID