

RE-IMAGINING THE SPACES IN BETWEEN

**Design Interventions to Transform Urban Voids
in Downtown Dayton into Active, Breathing Areas.**

*Joynal Abed Miami University 2023
Master of Architecture*



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into Active, Breathing Areas.**

By

Joynal Abed

THESIS ADVISOR:

Gerardo Brown-Manrique

*Professor of Architecture
Department of Architecture and Interior Design
Miami University*

THESIS READER:

Terry Welker

*Visting Assistant Professor of Architecture
Department of Architecture and Interior Design
Miami University*

THESIS READER:

May Khalife

*Assistant Professor of Architecture
Department of Architecture and Interior Design
Miami University*



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am truly grateful for the program, the faculty, and the people of Oxford. Their unwavering support and encouragement have been instrumental in the completion of this thesis.

First and foremost, I extend my heartfelt thanks to **Gerardo Brown-Manrique**, our Graduate Program Director, whose kindness and understanding have been a beacon of support throughout my journey. His willingness to listen to my concerns and offer assistance has made a world of difference.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to **May Khalife**, who has been more than a teacher—she has been like a big sister to me. Her guidance and nurturing of my passion for urban spaces have profoundly shaped my ideas and helped them flourish.

A special thanks goes to **Jeff Kruth**, one of the most inspiring faculty members I have had the privilege to learn from. His insights and encouragement have consistently fueled my creativity and enriched my thesis.

I am also grateful to **Terry Welker**, whose vast experience and captivating stories about Dayton have provided invaluable context and inspiration for my work.

To my friends who have become my family away from home: **S M Al Muied Pranto, Shams Tazim, Joydip Barua, Razvan Ruxanda, Chloe Wean, Tasnia Chowdhury, and Syed Saif**—thank you for your camaraderie and support. A special shoutout to **Sadia Sharmeen Shatyi**, who has always stood by me, and **Andrew Warman**, whose friendship and invaluable advice have greatly contributed to my studies.

I also want to extend my heartfelt thanks to **April Garrison and Joanne Howerton**, who have been my guardians here in Oxford, and to my family far away back home—your love and encouragement have been my anchor.



FORWARD

“Urban spaces, with their rush and complexities, always make me pause and marvel at how they work together in such intricate harmony.”

Cities have always been a source of wonder and inspiration for me. Having lived in cities most of my life, I developed a deep appreciation for their rhythm, vibrancy, and the dynamic interplay of people, places, and systems. Urban environments, with their intricacies and constant movement, evoke a unique energy—one that simultaneously challenges and captivates me. From navigating through bustling streets to observing the quiet, often unnoticed corners, I have always been mesmerized by how cities work. The seeming chaos, where so many independent elements come together to create a cohesive, functioning whole, has been a constant source of curiosity and admiration.

This fascination for urban spaces led me to design a waterfront project in my hometown of Bangladesh during my undergrads. The project aimed to transform an abandoned space in the heart of the city into a vibrant, integrated part of the urban network. This endeavor was more than just a design exercise; it was an exploration of the potential hidden within overlooked spaces and an opportunity to reconnect fragmented parts of the city. The process of reimagining this void instilled in me a desire to continue working on urban environments and to explore how design could bridge gaps, foster connections, and create meaningful public spaces.

My journey at Miami University further deepened my understanding and passion for urban spaces. Throughout my coursework, I was drawn to the complexities of urban environments, focusing my research and projects on the challenges they present. For many of my classes, I delved into topics such as gender biases in urban design and the systemic issues that shape our cities. These explorations allowed me to connect theoretical frameworks with real-world implications, sharpening my perspective on the nuances of urban spaces and the social dynamics they embody.

My thesis journey started with the ARC 636 course, where I worked on honing my understanding of urban voids and exploring their potential for transformation. This course introduced me to a variety of brainstorming exercises and discussions that helped shape my ideas. Among these exercises was a memorable soiree, where we first interacted with the faculty and shared

our initial thesis concepts. This interaction marked the start of a collaborative process that would guide me through the development of my thesis.

The turning point in my academic journey came during the summer when I worked in Dayton, Ohio. Downtown Dayton, with its blend of history, vibrancy, and underutilized spaces, became a canvas for my thoughts and ideas. As I navigated its streets and observed its urban voids, I was struck by the potential of these neglected areas. These spaces, hidden in plain sight, seemed to embody a mystery—a question waiting to be answered. They were disconnected from the city's broader narrative yet held the promise of becoming something more. This realization became the cornerstone of my thesis becoming something more. This realization became the cornerstone of my thesis.

Inspired by Dayton's urban fabric, this thesis seeks to address the physical voids within the downtown area and the broader need for spaces that foster solitude, reflection, and engagement. It represents an effort to connect these fragmented urban elements into a cohesive network of tranquil public spaces. Through this work, I aim to demonstrate how design interventions can transform overlooked spaces into assets that enhance the quality of life for city residents and visitors alike. The idea is not just to fill these voids but to create environments that invite people to pause, reflect, and reconnect with their surroundings.

To begin this thesis, I will start with the paper I wrote for ARC 636 and then build upon it to develop a comprehensive exploration of urban voids and their potential for transformation. This thesis is deeply personal to me. It combines my lifelong fascination with cities, my academic pursuits, and my professional aspirations. It reflects my belief that urban environments are not just places of movement and commerce but also spaces where people can find moments of tranquility and connection. My experiences in Dayton, Oxford, and my hometown have taught me that even the smallest, most ignored spaces can hold immense potential for transformation and impact.

In writing this thesis, I hope to contribute to the ongoing discourse on urban renewal and inspire others to see the hidden potential within their cities. This work is a testament to my belief that cities, despite their complexities, hold the key to creating spaces that nurture the human spirit. It is my hope that this thesis serves as a starting point for reimagining urban voids not as problems to be solved but as opportunities to be embraced, spaces that bring us closer to understanding the true essence of urban life.



01

**ARC 636
PAPER**

Redefining Urban Voids: Investigating The Role of Infrastructural Interventions in Activating the Voids of High-Density Urban Areas of the United States.

Joynal Abed
Miami University

Abstract:

In today's tremendously growing and busy urban landscapes, pockets of underutilized space, known as urban voids, stand as untapped opportunities for creating activated public spaces encouraging community engagement and social interaction. The thesis delves into the transformative potential of infrastructural interventions in reimagining these neglected spaces. Reclaiming and integrating these urban voids can create breathing spaces enhancing social cohesion for the city dwellers in high-density areas of the city.

Drawing upon a synthesis of theoretical frameworks, empirical analyses, and insights from some key practitioners this thesis explores the multifaceted dimensions of urban voids and the critical role that infrastructural interventions play in reshaping their urban fabric, fostering social connectivity, and promoting community engagement. Through a comprehensive review of the literature and case studies, it further examines the challenges and opportunities associated with infrastructural interventions in high-density urban areas, considering factors such as accessibility, inclusivity, active use, and sustainability. Ultimately, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how infrastructural interventions can redefine urban voids as vibrant hubs for social interaction and community gathering, thereby enriching the

fabric of high-density urban environments in the United States.

Introduction

Towering skyscrapers and high-rise buildings, bustling streets, narrow alleys and roads, huge traffic, and crowds everywhere is an everyday scenario for 80% of people in the USA living in an urban landscape today.¹ Amidst all these lie pockets of underutilized space known as urban voids. These voids, characterized by their absence of activity and vitality, present both a challenge and an opportunity for urban planners and designers seeking to nurture and promote community engagement and social cohesion in high-density urban areas.

Urban voids are areas within the urban fabric that are unused, non-functional, neglected, or disconnected from the surrounding environment, lacking in amenities or meaningful human activity most of the time. These spaces, whether abandoned lots or infrastructures like the Forest Fair Mall in Cincinnati², derelict infrastructures like the High Line of New York before it was redesigned, or neglected public areas, represent missed opportunities for vibrant urban life and community interaction.

The thesis aims to delve into the impacts of infrastructural interventions like the High Line in New York, the Uptown Station in Oakland, Zeitz

Museum of Contemporary Art in Africa, Kingway Brewery Renovation in China, etc. in revitalizing the urban voids and enhancing their usability, accessibility, and social significance by integrating them into the urban network of their surroundings. These interventions include physical alterations, such as the construction of new infrastructure or the repurposing of existing structures, as well as programming initiatives designed to activate the space and encourage community engagement. Central to this exploration is an examination of the critical role that infrastructural interventions play in reshaping the urban fabric and reinvigorating urban voids as dynamic spaces for communal exchange.

High-density urban areas in this context in the thesis are characterized not only by their dense population but also by buildings and infrastructure, dense layout of streets, and intersections presenting unique challenges and opportunities for urban development. In these areas, the need for accessible, inclusive public spaces is particularly acute, as their residents often face limited to no opportunities for social interaction and community engagement. This not only affects their social lives but also their personal lives as well as their health. That is why the thesis advocates the need for thoughtfully designed interventions in the void or neglected spaces of these dense areas which can intervene or cut into their complex urban life giving the city dwellers a breathing space where they can interact and connect. That is why through prescribing some design tactics and intervention strategies, this thesis endeavors to contribute to a deeper understanding of how infrastructural interventions can transform urban voids into thriving hubs of social activity, thereby enriching the fabric of high-density urban environments in the United States and beyond.

Reshaping Urban Voids: Transforming City Life

An intervention focused on community engagement and well-being opens a crack in the complex urban jungle allowing the city dwellers to breathe, respond to the built environment around them, and connect with other urban residents. The thesis in later parts investigates

this multifaceted realm of urban intervention, revealing some key observations and arguments that underscore the transformative potential of infrastructure in shaping the urban landscape. For now, the thesis puts forward its main statement that thoughtfully and strategically designed infrastructural interventions play a pivotal role in the urban setting, activating the space, and fostering social cohesion and community bonding.

The urban residents of the United States today are mostly overwhelmed with a scheduled life with rare opportunities for spontaneity or social and physical activities. By strategically deploying these designed interventions in the urban voids, they intervene in this machine-like routine of the urban residents creating welcoming, accessible, inclusive, and vibrant spaces that cater to their diverse needs and preferences.

Infrastructural Interventions: An action for activating the Urban Voids

Interventions can shift prevailing perceptions of public spaces and devise alternative uses through the potentialities of spatial politics and communicative social actions.³ They can change how we see public spaces by bringing in new uses and ways of perceiving the space through community interactions and actions. Generally, stepping in or interfering in an affair to help its course or action is termed an intervention.⁴ In line with this, the thesis looks at interventions as a verb or an action that intervenes in these voids of dense urban areas transforming them into active and multifunctional public spaces.

Infrastructural interventions work as catalysts for dense urban areas and activate the voids within them by integrating them into the dense urban fabric, engaging the urban residents with thoughtful design of the space which includes the needs and requirements of diversified strata of people and cultures inhabiting the urban area making it accessible to everyone. When residents use these interventions designed and catered to them and experience them together, they can redefine what urban areas mean to them, making these spaces feel more like their own and bringing communities closer.

These interventions can take different infrastructural forms like cultural or community centers, green parks, and mixed-use developments featuring retail spaces, co-working areas, and public gathering spaces and plazas. Some unconventional interventions also include urban farms and nature centers including recreational and activity spaces providing urban residents access to nature promoting consciousness towards our environment and physical activity among the residents. The thesis thus advocates that with thoughtful interventions, these spaces have the potential to foster social cohesion throughout the entire area making it active, inclusive, and sustainable.

Urban voids: the tipping points of high-density areas.

Most high-density urban areas contain underutilized and neglected spaces, often called urban voids. These neglected areas are perceived as burdens, but they hold untapped potential for positive changes that can benefit the entire city.



Figure 1: The abandoned High Line in the middle of Manhattan before it was renovated.

Due to their inherent nature as blank spaces within the complex urban fabric, these urban voids function as tipping points for the entire area. Though the term "tipping point" has a slight negative connotation meaning a point at which small changes have significantly large and irreversible impacts, the thesis uses the term to signify points in the urban fabric where a small change through an intervention will generate a ripple effect of positive change in the whole

urban area.⁵ These voids through proper interventions can capitalize on the high density of the area, creating a concentrated zone of impact that can revitalize the surrounding environment. Therefore, the thesis believes that these void spaces can be transformed into the beating heart of a more cohesive and engaged community through proper and significant infrastructural interventions.

The thesis also identifies these tipping points to be:

- **Critical Nodes:** Lost intersections, junctions, or transit centers that can serve as important nodes and central hubs of activity and connectivity within the urban landscape but are abandoned and neglected.
- **Natural Features:** Lakes, rivers, waterfront areas, and other natural features that have contributed to the generation, distinctiveness, sustainability, and livability of the dense area.
- **Crucial Public Spaces:** Public spaces or cultural establishments that are emblematic of the city's heritage, ethos, and shared identity.
- **Cohesive Spaces:** Underutilized public or communal spaces in the city conducive to promoting social cohesion, communal interaction, and engagement of the city dwellers.

Balancing Urban Transformation: Acknowledging Challenges in Infrastructural Interventions

The thesis believes in the beneficial outcomes of infrastructural interventions but also acknowledges their potential drawbacks. These infrastructural interventions, though foster social cohesion and enhance urban life, can also lead to challenges such as gentrification, impacts of real estate investments, and environmental effects. Moreover, they often have significant budgets and costs. Robert Hammond, one of the minds behind the High Line project, believes these initiatives may experience criticism despite noble intentions, highlighting the complexities surrounding such endeavors.⁶ The thesis accepts these

constraints and promotes that if these interventions are carried out thoughtfully, it is possible to minimize these negative factors if not eradicate them.

Practitioner Perspectives: Insights into Designing Vibrant Infrastructural Interventions

The thesis now delves into seminal works and insights from urban practitioners William H. Whyte, Janette Sadik-Khan, and Jan Gehl whose valuable insights into the principles and practices of successful urban interventions have been gleaned, emphasizing the importance of human-centric design, bold experimentation, and community engagement. It investigates the fundamental principles of designing urban public spaces as articulated by these distinguished practitioners as its objective is to conceptualize strategic infrastructural interventions aimed at creating public spaces to promote social cohesion and community engagement. This critical analysis will help the thesis in its end goal of formulating the design tactics for interventions activating the voids and as the thesis progresses, investigation into case studies will further uncover the intricate dynamics between interventions and their impact on urban areas, shedding light on how thoughtful design can activate spaces, foster social cohesion, and stimulate economic growth.

As William H. Whyte astutely observes in his seminal work, "The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces," successful urban public spaces are those that facilitate human interaction and engagement, providing residents with opportunities for leisure, recreation, and social exchange at the same time. Through meticulous observation and analysis of public spaces, Whyte identifies key design elements and social behaviors that contribute to the vibrancy and success of urban interventions, emphasizing the importance of user-centric design in creating spaces that resonate with the needs and desires of their inhabitants. But what makes Whyte, and his observations succeed even today is a keen sense of what designing for the urban residents and creating active public interventions mean irrespective of a timeframe.



Fig 2: Children playing at the High Line resembling the same vibe of playing on streets.

His research and observations on public spaces within urban environments have led him to a profound realization: People often choose to utilize streets and other unstructured, non-designed spaces not out of necessity due to a lack of open areas, but because they genuinely appreciate the absence of rigid control in their design and functionality.⁷ This preference is what contributes to the success of public spaces like the Seagram Building Plaza or Paley Park, making them universally appealing and empowering users with a sense of agency. Another crucial insight by Whyte is that people's verbal descriptions of how they use a space can be misleading; true understanding comes from observing their actual behavior.⁸ The most effective urban interventions aren't meticulously planned oases or escapes from urban complexities; rather, they embrace the city's inherent chaos, intervene thoughtfully, and create a beautiful contrast alongside human interactions. All this is possible by embracing the site's locality and using it to create a specific intervention for the area which leads to its success.

Expanding on William Whyte's call for observation, Jan Gehl emphasizes it as a fundamental and effective way to understand public spaces.⁹ He argues that well-designed architecture plays a crucial role in strengthening

the connection between these spaces and the activities that unfold within them. His unique perspective goes beyond observation, however. He posits that good architecture plays a critical role in strengthening the connection between public space and public life. However, Gehl observes a tendency for architects to prioritize aesthetics and design elements over the more intangible aspects of public life.¹⁰ Therefore, according to Gehl, successful interventions in urban spaces require thoughtful designs that foster this vital relationship between public space and the activities that bring it to life.

Additionally, the human-centric approach of Jan Gehl offers invaluable insights into the principles and practices of successful urban interventions. As Gehl eloquently articulates, "First life, then spaces, then buildings—the other way around never works."¹¹ It is the humans who are the end users of these spaces and by emphasizing the importance of designing for them, Gehl advocates for interventions that promote social interaction, physical activity, and community cohesion. Jane Jacobs, a champion of vibrant public spaces, also argued that successful city planning prioritizes "eyes on the street" for safety and a sense of community which reflect the same ideologies as Gehl.¹² By meticulously observing how people interact with city spaces, Gehl pinpoints human-centric design strategies that not only make these spaces more functional and livelier but also contribute to building more inclusive and sustainable urban interventions.

In addition to the analytical views of Whyte and Gehl, Janette Sadik-Khan's forward-thinking ideas, like those in her book "Streetfight: Handbook for an Urban Revolution," show how cities can be dramatically improved through thoughtful design interventions and clever changes. She speculates that public infrastructures or spaces can be lively areas where people connect, and communities thrive, and this can be done only by giving space back to the people.¹³ Thus, her approach challenges traditional urban design and calls for big, transformative changes. This paves the way for cities that are better places to live, with more equality and a stronger ability to handle challenges through changes in the form of interventions.

Activating the Urban Voids: Critical Analysis of Case Studies in Dense Urban Areas

In the exploration of how infrastructural interventions can revitalize urban voids, this thesis now analyzes three illuminating case studies chosen for their relevance to the research objective and their success in activating a neglected space, fostering social connectivity, and cultivating community engagement.

One of the prime examples under scrutiny is the High Line project in New York City, which serves as a testament to the transformative power of repurposing disused infrastructure. Manhattan thrives on the intense density which increases the need for social interaction within that density.¹⁴ Located amidst its bustling streets, the High Line ingeniously converted an abandoned railway viaduct into an elevated park adorned with lush greenery, captivating art installations, and inviting communal spaces.

The intervention in High Line is a project developed in an urban void of Manhattan that juxtaposes the original rail tracks with walkways, public seating, and lush greenery, offering a sanctuary from the urban chaos below. This thesis proposes that the High Line's selection wasn't random. Its location serves as a central point, a "tipping point," for the surrounding neighborhood. By transforming this underutilized space, the project reconnected crucial infrastructure nodes which in return changed the whole urban landscape of Manhattan around the area. This adaptive reuse of the High Line bound these important areas together, fostering a space that nurtures and strengthens social cohesion. Beyond its aesthetic beauty, the High Line has become a catalyst for economic revitalization and a focal point for community gatherings. It stands as a powerful symbol, demonstrating the potential of reimagining disused infrastructure in densely populated urban landscapes.

Much like New York's High Line, Paris' Viaduct des Arts showcases the same potential of transforming neglected urban voids. Once a forgotten railway viaduct cutting through a



Fig 3: The Viaduct of Paris with shops on the ground floor and a roof walkway and garden on top running through the streets.

densely populated area, it's now a thriving public space. The strategic design intervention has revitalized the viaduct, transforming it from an eyesore into a bustling hub. Arches beneath the viaduct now house artisan workshops and shops, attracting residents and visitors alike. The redesigned viaduct might appear to invade the city's existing fabric, but upon a critical look, it complements the urban network of the city. The Viaduct isn't just aesthetically pleasing; it has breathed new life into the neighborhood by creating a vibrant space for social interaction, strengthening the social fabric of this densely populated Parisian district.

The Kingway Brewery renovation in China is another exemplary infrastructural intervention that transformed an industrial derelict infrastructure into the cultural and social hub of the Luohu District in China. The project's innovative design approaches include repurposing the sedimentation tanks into a scenic garden with elevated walkways and converting its 33 cylindrical fermentation tanks into a versatile auditorium, exhibition hall, and open-air theater. Additionally, the conversion of the yeast recycling building into a public plaza and relaxation area showcases unconventional and thoughtful interventions that reimagine urban infrastructure. This case study underscores the transformative power of strategic and responsible design tailored to meet the needs of urban residents, illustrating how any abandoned urban void can be revitalized into a thriving urban hub for the residents. The success of this project lies in its out-of-the-box intervention of the space, keeping in mind what the residents of the Luohu District require and would benefit from.

An analysis of all these case studies reassures the same tactics of using void spaces in densely populated urban areas as the focal points of interventions. The major reason behind this is that these spaces, though neglected or unused today, were once the cornerstone of the urban area making them excellent focal points for the city. If they are carefully and strategically designed keeping the social and cultural needs of the urban residents in mind, these

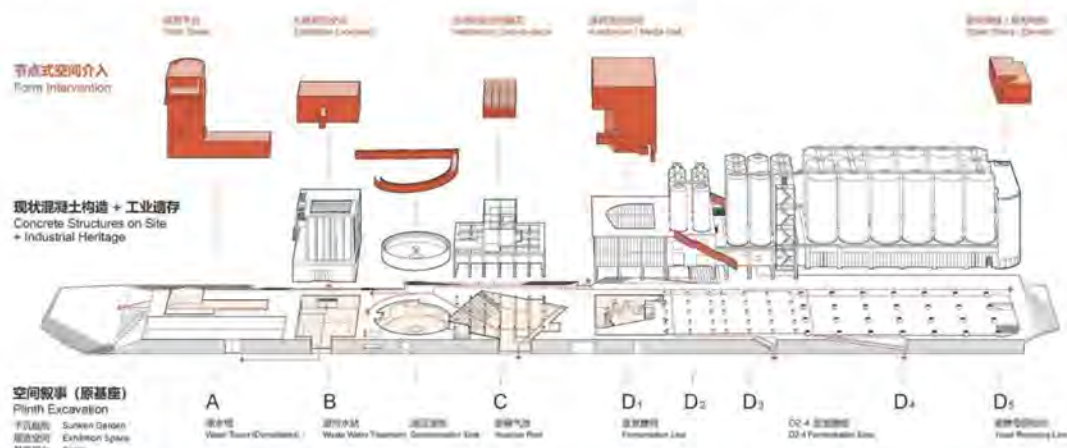


Figure 4: Axonometric view of the Kingway Brewery Renovation Project showing how the different industrial complexes were transformed into public spaces with thoughtful design.

interventions can reverberate throughout the entire urban neighborhood.

Design Tactics for Urban Void Activation

In examining case studies such as the High Line, the Viaduct des Arts in Paris, and the 606 project in Chicago, alongside insights from urban design practitioners, the thesis now moves towards the main goals of its extensive arguments placed so far suggesting a wealth of design process tactics which offer a nuanced understanding of how to effectively activate voids within high-density urban areas. These tactics, thus, provide a roadmap for urban revitalization efforts aimed at fostering social cohesion and community engagement.

1/ The first design tactic is designing the intervention keeping in mind the locality or specificity of the region. This can be achieved by being observant of human behavior in how they use public spaces. The behavior of the residents in a public space of one urban setting due to differences in their culture and social life will be different from the other. It is all about understanding how people in a particular urban setting use public spaces and what makes them feel like they belong. By observing this, we can

design interventions that not only fulfill these needs but also capture the true spirit of public life in the urban area.

2/ The second design tactic for transforming urban voids into vibrant community spaces is the multi-functional activation of the space through the intervention. This tactic involves creating a space that serves a variety of purposes, catering to different needs and interests within the community. By combining all these elements, the intervention doesn't just create a single-use space, but a multi-functional destination, a focal point that fosters social interaction, promotes a sense of community ownership, and caters to the diverse needs of a high-density urban environment.

3/ Involving the community and the urban residents from the very beginning is key to creating a space they truly feel connected to. Inclusive and participatory design tactics achieve this by encouraging resident input throughout the design process. Modular elements like movable benches or planters as well as art installations that invite people to engage with the space could allow residents to personalize the space for different activities, fostering a sense of control and belonging.

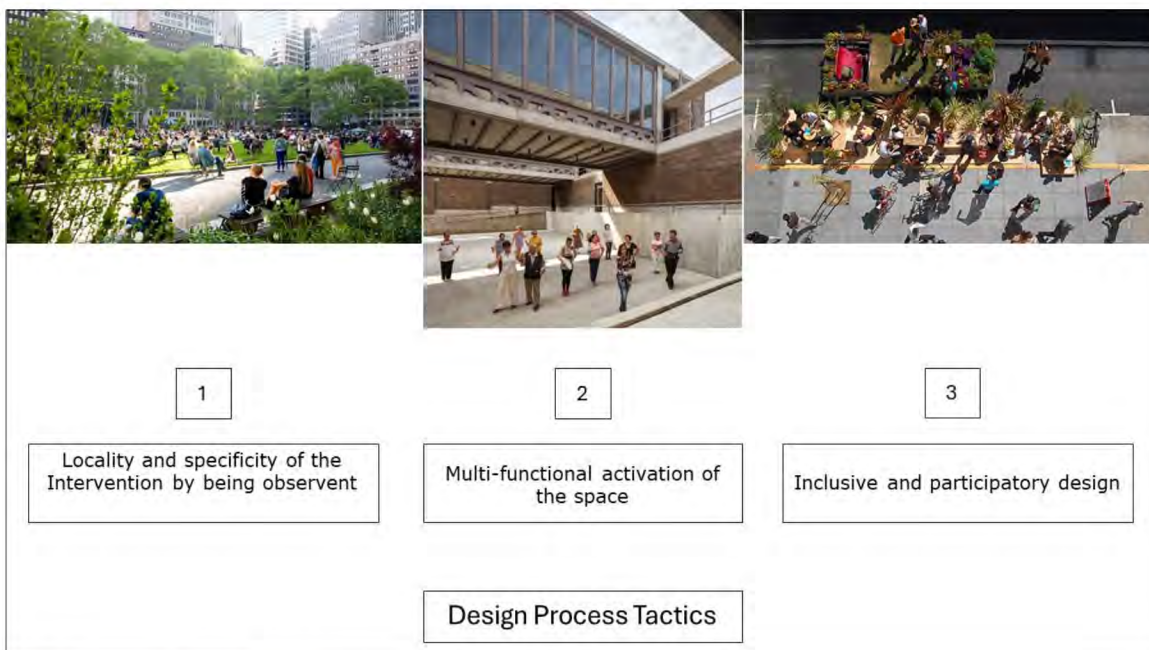


Figure 5: Design Process Tactics.

Interventions where residents contribute their ideas and participate or can use the space flexibly as they desire to, not only beautify the space but also create a powerful symbol of collective pride and rootedness. By incorporating this tactic, interventions in urban voids can become more than just designed spaces – they can become testaments to community spirit and collaboration, fostering a stronger sense of connection within the high-density urban environment.

Activating the Urban Voids through Interventions: Contextual Considerations in Ohio

The thesis, along with its arguments and speculations, advocates for a contextual setting where infrastructural projects can intervene and breathe life into the dense urban area, specifically addressing the existing voids within that urban landscape. The thesis finds the downtown areas in Cincinnati, Dayton, Cleveland, and other densely populated regions of Ohio as ideal contexts for such interventions. This speculation is grounded in the presence of numerous urban voids within or around these downtown areas, which hold a historical or cultural significance. The thesis has already discussed before that any responsible infrastructural intervention in these areas can act as the focal points for the broader urban community, enhancing the urban experience for the residents and promoting a sense of welcome, relaxation, and sustainability. Moreover, the thesis believes that these areas are in dire need of an intervention to break the complexity of the urban life created by evolution and their rich history so that there's a new breathing space for the urban residents.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the exploration of infrastructural interventions in activating urban voids within high-density urban areas offers valuable insights into the transformative potential of thoughtful design processes. Dense urban spaces, when well-designed, can foster a greater sense of community and belonging.¹⁵ Drawing upon a synthesis of case studies and theoretical frameworks proposed by leading practitioners, this study has illuminated a range

of design process tactics aimed at fostering social cohesion, community engagement, and sustainable urban development.

Throughout the examination of case studies such as the High Line, Paris Viaduct, and the Kingway Brewery, alongside insights from urban design luminaries like William H. Whyte, Janette Sadik-Khan, and Jan Gehl, it becomes evident that community engagement is paramount in shaping successful infrastructural interventions. By actively involving residents and stakeholders in the design process, cities can ensure that urban revitalization efforts are responsive to the unique needs and aspirations of the community, ultimately fostering a sense of ownership and stewardship over public spaces.

Moreover, the principles of adaptive reuse and tactical urbanism emerge as powerful tools for reimagining urban voids as vibrant hubs for social interaction and cultural expression. By repurposing existing infrastructure and embracing temporary interventions, cities can leverage their resources more effectively, minimize environmental impact, and catalyze positive change at the neighborhood level. Through strategic implementation of these design process tactics, cities can create more resilient, inclusive, and livable urban environments that enrich the lives of residents and visitors alike.

As we look to the future, it is clear that the lessons learned from this study will continue to inform and inspire urban development efforts around the world. By prioritizing human-centered design principles, fostering community engagement, and embracing innovative approaches to urban revitalization, cities can unlock the full potential of their urban voids, transforming them into vibrant and dynamic spaces that reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of their inhabitants. In doing so, we can create cities that are not only more functional and sustainable but also more equitable, inclusive, and socially cohesive.

Endnotes

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¹ Fig 1: The High Line before its construction, Courtesy of Joel Sternfield.

² Fig 2: The High Line, Courtesy of Max Touhey.

³ Fig 3: The Viaduct of Paris, Courtesy of Roland Nizet

⁴ Fig 4: The Kingway Brewery Renovation Project, Courtesy of Kangyu Hu.

⁵ Fig 5: Design Process Tactics, Courtesy of The Author.

Annotated Bibliography

Ataman, Cem & Tunçer, Bige. 2021. Urban Interventions and Participation Tools in Urban Design Processes: A Systematic Review and Thematic Analysis (1995 – 2021). *Sustainable Cities and Society*. 76. 103462. [10.1016/j.scs.2021.103462](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2021.103462). This paper conducts an in-depth review and thematic analysis of urban interventions and

participation tools in urban design processes spanning from 1995 to 2021. The various methodologies and approaches used in this book to explain how to engage communities and stakeholders in urban design projects, providing insights into effective strategies for fostering participation, collaboration, and inclusivity will help the thesis to hypothesize about infrastructural interventions and give it direction.

Borch, Christian, and Martin Kornberger. 2016. *Urban Commons: Rethinking the city*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. This source explores the concept of urban commons and its implications for urban design, governance, and social cohesion. It discusses how shared resources and collective spaces can foster collaboration, equity, and sustainability in cities, offering insights for promoting collective action and participatory approaches to urban public space design and management.

Brown, Lance Jay, 1943-, David Dixon and Oliver. Gillham. 2014. *Urban Design for an Urban Century: Shaping More Livable, Equitable, and Resilient Cities*. Hoboken, Wiley. It examines the evolution of urban design and its role in addressing contemporary challenges, offering a comprehensive overview of strategies for creating more inclusive and sustainable urban design interventions.

Carmona, Matthew, Claudio de Magalhães, and Leo Hammond. 2008. *Public Space : The Management Dimension*. London: Routledge. Focusing on the management and governance of public spaces in urban environments, this book provides insights into various aspects such as maintenance, programming, safety, and regulation. It examines the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders in ensuring the effective use and stewardship of public spaces, offering valuable guidance to the paper for important speculations about the right way of designing public spaces.

Carmona, Matthew, Tim Heath, Taner Oc, and Steve Tiesdell. 2010. *Public Places Urban Spaces : The Dimensions of Urban Design*. 2nd ed. Burlington: Elsevier Science. The book provides a comprehensive overview of the theory and practice of urban design and its

impact on people, including the role of public spaces in enhancing the quality of urban life and fostering social connections. It helps the thesis make its speculations on how interventions that are public spaces can create a healthy and livable city for urban dwellers.

Faga, Barbara. 2006. *Designing Public Consensus : The Civic Theater of Community Participation for Architects, Landscape Architects, Planners, and Urban Designers*. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley.

The authors explore the process of engaging communities in the design of public spaces, emphasizing the importance of consensus-building in creating spaces that reflect the needs and desires of their users. It helps the thesis in forming its participatory design tactic which advocates on the active participation of the stakeholder communities in the design processes of the urban landscape.

Gehl, Jan, and Birgitte Svarre. 2013. *How to Study Public Life*. Washington, D.C., DC: Island Press.

Gehl presents methodologies for analyzing public life and the interaction between the urban setting and social behaviors, providing essential tools for analyzing the effectiveness of urban interventions in promoting active engagement.

Gehl, Jan. 2010. *Cities for People*. Washington DC: Island Press.

This book puts forward principles for designing urban spaces that prioritize human needs first, creating a blueprint for creating more livable and sustainable urban environments. It is relevant to the thesis in its advocacy for infrastructure that enhances the quality of urban life.

"High Line." DS+R. Accessed May 5, 2024. <https://dsrny.com/project/the-high-line>.

Exploring the design and development of New York City's High Line, this web article offers an in-depth look at how a former railway viaduct was transformed into an innovative elevated park and turned out to become one of the most significant infrastructural interventions of the world. It also showcases the High Line's impact on urban regeneration, landscape architecture, and community engagement and helps the

thesis with its case study and critical analysis of the project.

Jacobs, Jane. 1993. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York, NY: Vintage Books. Jacobs critiques modern urban planning policies and strongly believes in community-based approaches to city growth, reminding us what is the heart of every urban setting. This work is foundational for understanding the thesis's emphasis on user-centered urban design interventions and how they can contribute to building social cohesion among city dwellers.

Lang, Jon T. 2017. *Urban Design : A Typology of Procedures and Products : Illustrated with over 50 Case Studies*. Second edition. New York, NY: Routledge.

This comprehensive book deals with the procedures of urban design and the important design tactics in shaping the urban landscape. It offers an overview of urban design processes and products, categorizing them into different typologies which will guide the thesis to the varied factors that the interventions are dependent on.

Lydon, Mike, and Anthony Garcia. 2015. *Tactical Urbanism : Short-Term Action for Long-Term Change*. Washington, DC: Island Press. <https://doi.org/10.5822/978-1-61091-567-0>. It presents a series of low-cost, temporary changes to the urban landscape aimed at improving neighborhoods and cities, highlighting the potential for small-scale interventions to catalyze long-term improvements. It strongly advocates that small or large interventions can bring contrasting change to an urban landscape and helps the thesis understand the reasons for these small interventions' successes.

Lynch, Kevin. 1960. *The Image of the City*. Harvard-MIT Joint Center for Urban Studies Series. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press. It explores how individuals perceive and use urban environments and different public interventions, highlighting the importance of strategic, well-designed interventions in cities. This text supports the thesis by emphasizing the role of design in urban usability and navigation and investigates the right design decisions for it.

Monkkonen, P. 2023. 'Emergent Tokyo: Designing the Spontaneous City: <u class="uu">Jorge Almazan + Studiolab</u> (2022). ORO Editions'. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 89(4), pp. 601–602. doi: 10.1080/01944363.2023.2194809.

Exploring the genre of emergent urbanism, it investigates its application in designing Tokyo's spontaneous city and ways of making it sustainable and appealing to the residents of Tokyo. It offers The thesis insights into how unplanned and spontaneous urban processes shape the built environment and influence design decisions, providing alternative approaches to urban design that embrace the dynamic and evolving nature of cities.

Montgomery, Charles, 1968-. 2013. *Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design*. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

The book investigates how urban design influences happiness and well-being, encouraging thoughtful interventions that foster social connections and contentment. Its relevance to the thesis stems from its exploration of the psychological impacts of urban design on urban residents and how it makes a city sustainable and livable.

Müller, Helena & Rehn-Groenendijk, Jonas & Wasmer, Anna. 2023. Small-scale urban design interventions: A framework for deploying cities as resource for mental health and mental health literacy. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 14. 10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1112209.

The authors propose a framework for designing small-scale urban design interventions to promote mental health and mental health awareness within cities. It examines the potential of cities as resources for improving mental well-being through thoughtful design interventions and offers practical strategies and design principles for creating supportive urban environments that nurture a sense of belonging. It helps the thesis understand how mental health is related to people's experiences of public space or intervention in the urban setting.

Sadik-Khan, Janette, and Seth Solomonow. 2016. *Streetfight : Handbook for an Urban Revolution*. New York (N.Y.): Viking.

This book offers insights into reimagining urban spaces for better mobility and livability, relevant to its practical strategies for transforming cities into a hub for social cohesion. It provides the thesis with critical observations on how the urban elements and public spaces can transform the lives of the residents on how they experience it every day.

Speck, Jeff. 2012. *Walkable City : How Downtown Can Save America, One Step at a Time*. 1st ed. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

This argues the benefits of walkable cities in addressing environmental and health issues, making a case for urban design that promotes pedestrian-friendly environments and how that impacts the well-being of the residents. This aligns with the thesis's interest in active, engaging urban spaces and helps it to identify the elements that factor in making an intervention active and usable by the urban residents.

Wang, Shaoqiang. 2020. *Urban interventions: Design ideas for the public space*. Hong Kong: Sandu.

This publication discusses design ideas and strategies for urban interventions aimed at revitalizing public spaces. It also vocalizes that strategic design ideas can transform the public spaces of a dense city transforming it into a breathing hub for city dwellers. It helps the thesis in its speculations about the impacts of interventions in dense urban areas.

Whyte, William H., Jr., 1917-1999. *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*. Washington, D.C. :Conservation Foundation, 1980.

This book offers insights into how people use public spaces in urban settings and what leads to their successes and failures. It's relevant to the thesis for its emphasis on the influence of physical spaces on social dynamics and the critical observations that it makes on the design tactics of designing public spaces.



02

INTRODUCTION

Reimagining the Spaces In Between

In the heart of downtown Dayton, Ohio, lies an intricate interplay of history, emptiness, and opportunity. Urban voids—those pockets of unused, forgotten, and overlooked spaces—dot the city's landscape, telling a story of transition and neglect. These urban voids, however, are not mere absences but spaces brimming with potential. My thesis seeks to reimagine these voids as catalysts for renewal, tranquility, and connection.

*Image 1:
An Urban Void in Dayton
Downtown.
Photo Courtesy: Taken By
The Author*



Urban voids can be broadly defined as the spaces left behind by the ebb and flow of urban development—vacant lots, underutilized plots, or remnants of infrastructure that no longer serve their original purpose. In this thesis, I envision them as transformative opportunities to create a network of tranquil public spaces. These spaces aim to offer moments of pause and introspection within Dayton's bustling downtown, fostering deeper engagement with the city's layered history and evolving identity.

Downtown Dayton, with its rich industrial heritage, was once a thriving hub of innovation and commerce. However, economic decline and shifting urban dynamics have left many of its spaces underutilized. Today, the city's central business district reflects these changes through high office vacancy rates and a diminished population. Yet amidst these challenges lies a unique opportunity to redefine how urban spaces are perceived and utilized.

These urban voids also embody the essence of adaptability. Over time, as cities evolve and functions shift, such spaces often acquire new roles—whether as informal green areas, pop-up community hubs, or even sites of artistic intervention. My vision expands upon this inherent adaptability by proposing a framework for

their intentional transformation into vibrant public realms. By prioritizing accessibility, tranquility, and ecological integration, these spaces can become the lungs of downtown Dayton, supporting both physical and mental well-being.

Additionally, urban voids offer a chance to reconnect with the past while addressing the needs of the present. The remnants of Dayton's industrial heyday, including the site of the former Union Station, evoke collective memories that can anchor a renewed sense of place. By integrating design elements

that honor this history, the transformation of voids can resonate with both longtime residents and new visitors, fostering a shared appreciation for the city's layered narrative.

By exploring the potential of Dayton's urban voids, this thesis offers a vision of renewal—one that pays homage to the city's history while embracing innovative urban design strategies. A more in-depth discussion of the key concepts and themes, including solitude, liminality, and connectivity, will be presented in the subsequent sections of

*Image 2:
The Abandoned Dayton
Daily News Headquarters.
Photo Courtesy: Taken By
The Author*

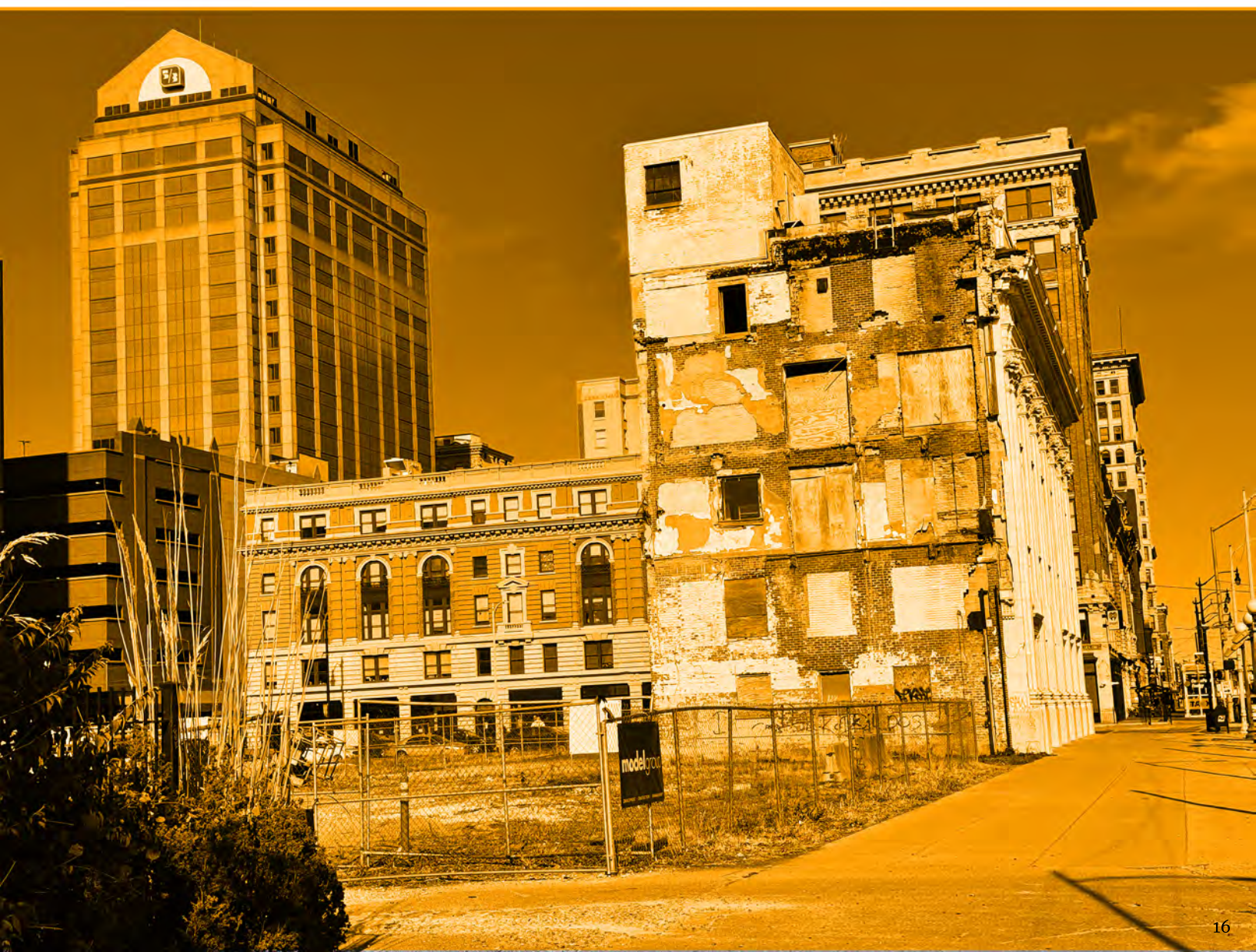




Image 3:
The Downtown Dayton.
*Photo Courtesy: Skyline
Scenes.*

this document. Together, these discussions will frame a design approach that transforms Dayton's urban voids into spaces of reflection, connection, and revitalization.

This document is organized to guide the reader through the layered narrative of urban voids and their potential transformation. The journey begins with a detailed exploration of the context, focusing on the history of the site and its surroundings. Following this, the discourse around urban voids and their interpretations will be examined to provide a foundation for the design approach.

The next section will delve into an in-depth analysis of the site,

considering its spatial, historical, and social dimensions. Finally, the document will culminate in the presentation of the design proposal—a vision for reimagining Dayton's urban voids as interconnected spaces of liminality and engagement.

Through this structured approach, the thesis aims to present a comprehensive narrative that connects theory, context, and design, offering a framework for revitalizing urban voids in downtown Dayton.



03

**THE SITE:
A HISTORICAL
AND SPATIAL OVERVIEW**

History of the Dayton Union Station and Its Surroundings.



Image 4:
The Dayton Union Train Station in July, 1970.
Courtesy: Dayton Daily News Archive

The Legacy of the Dayton Union Train Station

The Dayton Union Station, a pivotal piece of Dayton's urban fabric, opened in 1900. Its construction marked a period of economic growth and industrial prosperity in the city. As a central rail hub, it replaced an earlier depot and became a

train tracks. Two remain operational, while the other two lie abandoned, overgrown with wild shrubs and plants—a striking symbol of nature reclaiming unused urban spaces. These skeletal traces stand as a testament to the station's former glory and its current state of neglect, highlighting the broader challenges faced by post-industrial cities like Dayton.

The downtown area—particularly the site of the Dayton Union Station—captures the narrative of urban transition. Vacant lots, unused buildings, and infrastructural gaps punctuate the city's core, creating urban voids that embody both absence and potential. These voids are not merely empty spaces; they represent opportunities for renewal and reinterpretation of Dayton's urban identity.

The station's site, located at a critical downtown node, is surrounded by key landmarks such as Sinclair University, the Great Miami Riverfront, the Dayton Convention Center, Levitt Pavilion, and various playgrounds and stadiums. These surrounding elements underscore the potential of the station site to serve as a unifying element—a stitch that weaves together the disparate parts of downtown Dayton.



Image 5:
Dayton Union Train Station back in the days.
Photo Courtesy: Dayton Daily News Archives.

bustling point of convergence for travelers and goods, embodying Dayton's significance as a transportation node in the Midwest. The station served the city until Amtrak briefly took over in 1971, only to see its complete cessation of services and eventual demolition in 1979.

Today, the remnants of the station consist of four elevated

Dayton's Industrial Rise and Fall

Dayton's industrial roots shaped its identity and spatial development. The city's rise was marked by its contributions to innovation, manufacturing, and the development of aviation technology. Companies such as NCR Corporation and Delco were headquartered in Dayton, driving economic prosperity and making the city a hub of industrial activity in the Midwest.

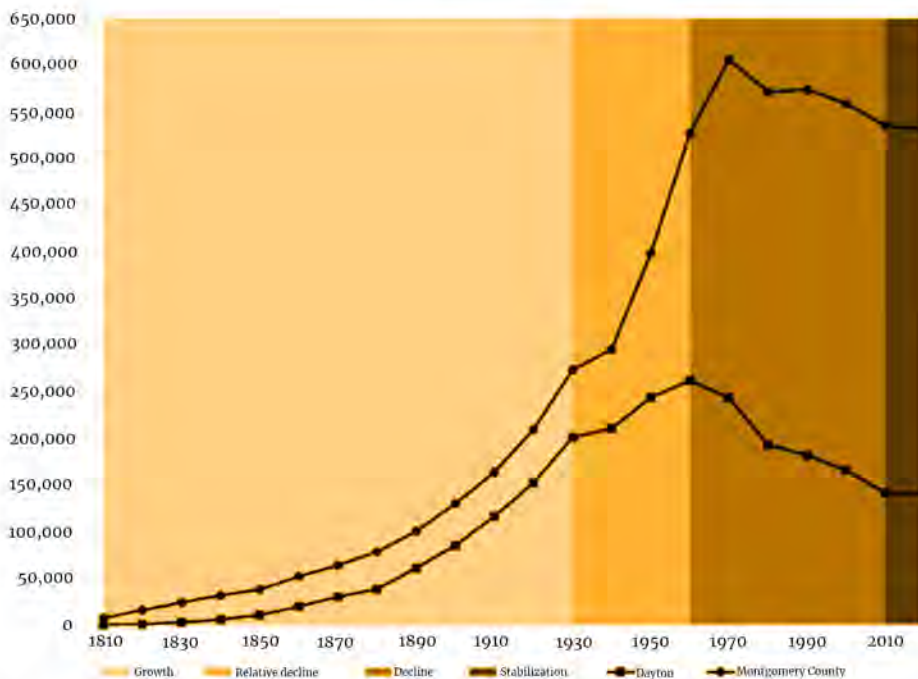


Image 6
Population of Dayton and Montgomery County from 1810 to 2010.

Photo Courtesy: Forbes.
Data From: US BCensus Bureau

However, the decline of manufacturing in the late 20th century initiated a cascade of economic and social challenges. The city's population, once at a peak of 262,332 in 1960, plummeted to 137,644 by 2020. This decline reflected a broader trend of urban shrinkage as industries relocated or shut down entirely. With fewer jobs, the city struggled to retain its residents, and neighborhoods

DAYTON VISTAS

Dayton and Its Apotheosis: The Making and Re-Making of an American City

LOST

Image 7

News Clipping from the Dayton Daily Newspaper Website.

Photo Courtesy: Dayton Daily News.

became increasingly vacant. Downtown Dayton mirrored these struggles, as high office vacancy rates—now among the highest in the nation at 34%—exacerbated the sense of stagnation.

The 21st century brought additional hurdles. The rise of remote work, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, further diminished the need for traditional office spaces. Iconic buildings in Dayton's downtown core, once bustling with activity, now stand underutilized or empty. Vacant lots and neglected spaces tell a story of businesses that closed their doors and opportunities lost to economic shifts.

Among these changes, Dayton's Union Station became emblematic of the city's broader struggles. After its closure, the surrounding area—formerly a vital hub of movement and activity—became a fragmented landscape. The station's absence left a void not only in the urban fabric but also in the collective memory of the city, reflecting the challenges of adapting to economic decline and infrastructural redundancy.

Dayton Daily News

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Why is there a white door on the old Dayton Daily News building?



WHAT TO LOVE

By Amelia Robinson

Updated Sept 26, 2017



Image 8
Snippet from the Dayton Daily News.
Photo Courtesy: Dayton Daily News.

Dayton Daily News

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Local

Local Business Investigations Opinion Life Food Sports Obituaries Classifieds Legal Notices ePaper

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In its day, Dayton's Union Station was a "handsome palace"

The posting of that photograph reminded me of that hopeful and colorful era – of local companies that had made good, celebrating with new creations – ever implying that Downtown still had a path back to the tumult of what had been when thousands smacked the city sidewalks shopping in specialty stores, the celebrated departments stores, the drug stores, and the **five-and-dimes**. They found solace in movie theaters and restaurants, diners, and counters. **Everyone's doctor was Downtown – even their lawyers and car dealers.** They bought pianos, radios, furniture suites, formal suits, endless arrays of shoes and hats, and they worshipped there. They attended legitimate theater and Vaudeville there. On weekends they roller skated downtown.

South Ludlow Street became "The Fifth Avenue of Dayton" by the mid-nineteen-teens – a shocking moniker considering its current state, but this energy was still sending out echoes in 1974. Yet, fewer and fewer of the young who came through the district would believe that this had been the center of the universe, and eventually it became, through rings of happenstance, a largely empty zone of real estate – vacant shapes on the horizon. There were always embers of hope, with new life being given to the **Victoria Theatre**, two office towers rising, the burgeoning riverfront, and a truly fine new baseball stadium. Yet, sand was still escaping from the valve, and even Arcade Square – the loved and ancient city market and shopping center – closed thirteen years after it re-opened as a center of fun (and essentially as a mall), only to be crassly abandoned over time.

Since then, the newer components arrived, led by the grand Schuster Center and its palm court and first-class opera house. Yet so many Daytonians weren't happy. **The stores were missing, the once-crowded sidewalks were bathed in empty light, and fears of a no-man's land began to accrue. "Can't go there, too dangerous."**

It didn't matter if it was not. The feeling that the center city was past-tense was fueled by investments that now sought suburban audiences – many who had never actually set foot on a patch of downtown sidewalk. The center city had, essentially, moved out of town. In this series I hope to show that Downtown Dayton, as Dayton itself, is an ever-shifting creation that can yet be the center of light, hope, commerce, and joy.

Image 9
Snippet from the Dayton Daily News.
Photo Courtesy: Dayton Daily News.



Image 10 News Boys Picnic
Early Images of the Dayton Daily News Headquarters.
Photo Courtesy: Dayton Daily News.



Image 11
Current Images of the Dayton Daily News Headquarters.
Photo Courtesy: Taken By the Author



Image 12
5th Main St., Dayton Downtown.
Photo Courtesy: Andrew Walsh, Dayton Vistas.



04

DISCOURSE

ON

URBAN VOIDS AND DOWNTOWN DAYTON



Image 13
Different types of void spaces in High-Density Urban Areas.

Urban Voids: Definitions and Perspectives

Urban Voids are viewed in distinct, contrasting ways by different theorists.

Rem Koolhaas, for instance, describes urban voids as 'junk spaces' — fragmented and leftover areas born from chaotic urban expansion, often devoid of purpose or coherence, representing the transitory and fragmented nature of contemporary cities. In contrast, Kevin Lynch perceives these undefined spaces as 'negative spaces' that disrupt the cognitive map of a city, diminishing its legibility and cohesion for inhabitants. Aldo Rossi, however, sees urban voids through a historical lens, suggesting they are essential elements that embody a city's collective memory and identity, holding latent potential rooted in the past that can be reactivated to shape the urban future. Adrian Forty adds another layer to this understanding by emphasizing that 'space' in architecture is more than mere physical absence; it encompasses the qualities, uses, and experiences

that fill it. He suggests that spaces, even those unbuilt or vacant, contribute meaningfully to the urban context when thoughtfully considered. Together, these perspectives reflect a spectrum of interpretations—from spaces of neglect to potential areas rich with history, context, and meaning.



Image 14
An Abandoned Parking Lot- An Urban Void in Downtown Dayton.
Photo Courtesy: Taken by the Author.

But at first glance, through the eyes of an observer, these gaps—formed by vacant lots, unused areas, and spaces left by infrastructural shifts—might appear as mere absences or negative spaces.

However, as Henri Lefebvre highlights, even these 'unused' spaces hold a form of 'use value,' serving various roles beyond their economic

exchange value. Nature begins to reclaim these voids, shaping them into spontaneous ecosystems, and property assessors leverage these spaces to gauge neighborhood values, reflecting Lefebvre's assertion that social spaces are never purely passive but rather enact and resist different social forces.

Therefore, while these spaces lack traditional uses, they

actively shape and are shaped by social, economic, and natural processes. Recognizing their latent potential for reappropriation, especially in post-industrial cities like Dayton, highlights the transformative possibilities of urban voids as sites for renewal and reconceptualization.

Urban voids offer a unique opportunity to redefine how we perceive public spaces within our cities. These spaces are not just gaps in the urban fabric; they hold potential as sanctuaries of tranquility and liminality—areas where individuals can pause, reflect, and experience a moment of quiet away from the city's rhythm.

Image 15
An Abandoned and
Downtown office building
in Downtown Dayton.
Photo Courtesy: Taken by
the Author.





Image 16
*An Interpretive collage of the void spaces
in Downtown Dayton.*

*Photo Courtesy: An Exercise done by
the Author.*

By 'tranquility,' I mean creating spaces that support solitude and introspection, fostering a slower, more contemplative interaction with the urban landscape, and the material culture of the city and its inhabitants.

This is particularly relevant in cities like Dayton, where remnants of past industries and changing infrastructures evoke collective memories that can anchor a sense of place. My thesis sees these spaces not as escapes but as meaningful places that deepen our engagement with downtown Dayton.



Image 17
Riverfront Park in Downtown Dayton.

*Photo Courtesy: Taken by
the Author.*



Downtown Dayton offers a unique atmosphere of solitude that sets it apart from larger, bustling downtowns like Chicago or New York. Unlike the overwhelming density and constant rush of these metropolitan areas, Dayton's downtown is marked by a quieter, more reflective urban rhythm, which Michel de Certeau might describe as an opportunity for personal engagement within the city's structured framework.

Image 18
The Quiet Contemplative
Nature of Downtown Dayton.
Photo Courtesy: Taken by
the Author.

Theoretical Insights: De Certeau and Kevin Lynch

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau explores how individuals navigate and redefine urban spaces through their own lived experiences, treating practices like walking as subtle acts of resistance that subvert the dominant, planned structures of the city.

“People’s intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together.”

–Michel de Certeau

Walking through downtown Dayton, one quickly notices its voids. These spaces, scattered between office buildings, parking lots, and residential blocks, are often ignored and passed by without thought. But what if we could change that? What if these voids could be seen not as neglected areas but as spaces with inherent use value—opportunities for the city to breathe, to offer moments of pause and reflection amidst the daily rush, rather than merely as

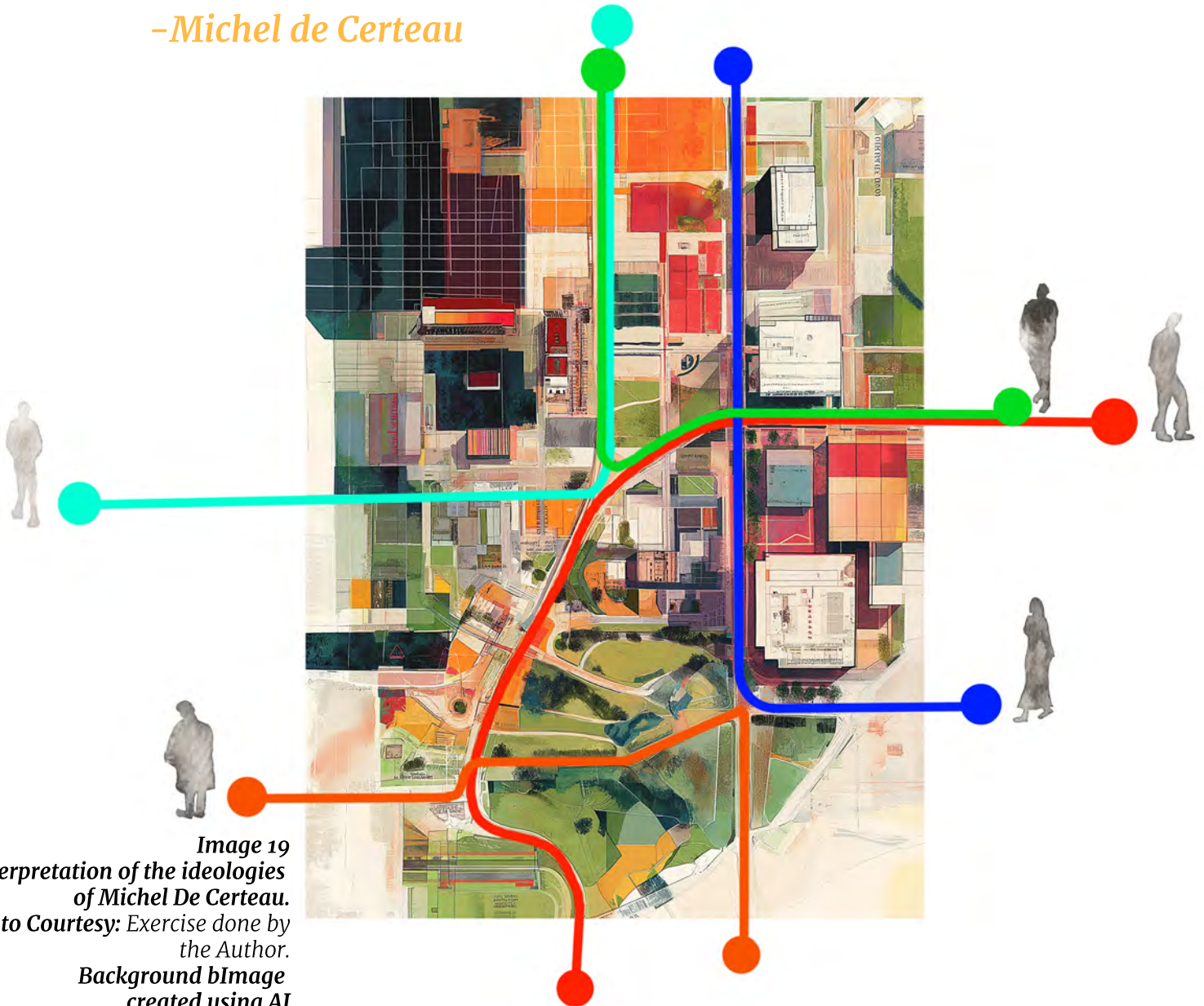


Image 19
Interpretation of the ideologies of Michel De Certeau.
Photo Courtesy: Exercise done by the Author.
Background bImage created using AI

parcels of land valued for potential economic exchange?

To understand how we might rethink these urban voids inspiration can be drawn from Michel de Certeau's theory of "The Practice of Everyday Life", which I have already mentioned, and the idea of psychogeography. De Certeau argues that walking through a city is more than just movement; it's a 'spatial practice' that constructs a personal narrative, a way for individuals to reinterpret and reimagine urban spaces. Every step we take in a city adds to this narrative, shaping how we understand the space around us. This narrative

is unique to every person as are their perspectives of space and the choices they make--as by human nature, everyone will not take the same path in a defined space.

Psychogeography, as practiced by the Situationists and urbanist Kevin Lynch, on the other hand, emphasizes the emotional and psychological relationship we have with urban spaces. It asks us to consider how the physical environment affects our mood, our sense of well-being, and our experience of the city. For me, these concepts are crucial in understanding the potential of Dayton's urban voids. Rather than seeing these spaces as empty or devoid of meaning, we can view them as opportunities for creating new narratives—spaces where individuals can engage with the city in a more reflective, personal way.

'We all travel with many maps, neatly folded and tucked away in the glove compartment of memory – some of them communal and universal, like our autonomic familiarity with seasonal constellations and the shape of continents, and some as particular as the local roads that we have all traipsed.' (Stephen Hall, p.15 in Harmon 2004)



Image 20:
A Psychogeographical Sketch.
Photo Courtesy: Chris Rose,
a psychotherapist.



05

SITE ANALYSIS

OF

THE DAYTON UNION TRAIN STATION

An Analysis of the Land Use of Downtown Dayton

The current land use in downtown Dayton is predominantly occupied by office buildings and parking garages. These spaces dominate the urban fabric, leaving limited room for other forms of activity or engagement. Surface parking lots, in particular, take up a significant portion of the landscape, reflecting a car-centric urban planning approach. It also has a unique nature that can only be fully experienced on foot, which aligns with the main target of this thesis—reimagining these spaces to enhance pedestrian engagement and personal interaction with the urban fabric. While these areas serve a functional purpose, they fail to contribute to the vibrancy or livability of the city. In stark contrast to the abundance of parking facilities, downtown Dayton has a scarcity of open spaces where residents and visitors can relax and breathe. Public parks and plazas are few and far between, limiting opportunities for leisure and interaction. These open spaces are not well-integrated into the urban fabric, further diminishing their potential to serve as cohesive and inviting environments for urban dwellers. This imbalance highlights the need for intentional urban design interventions that prioritize the creation of tranquil, accessible spaces for the community.

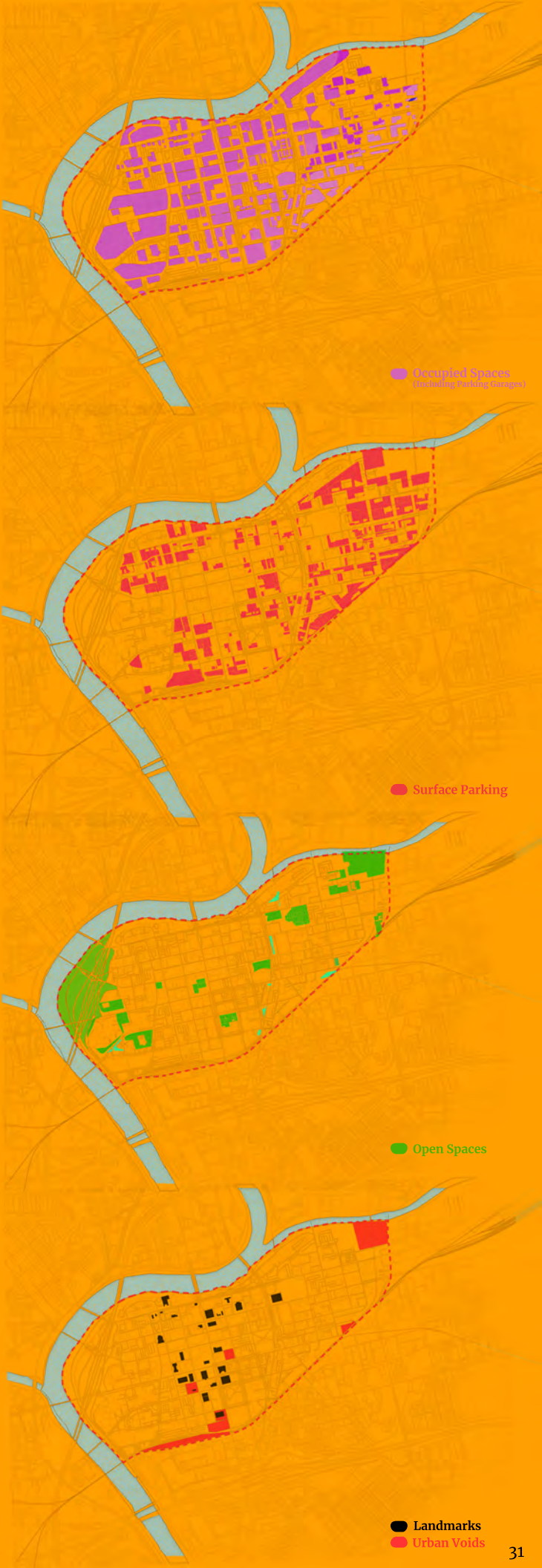


Diagram 1:
Landuse Map of Downtown Dayton

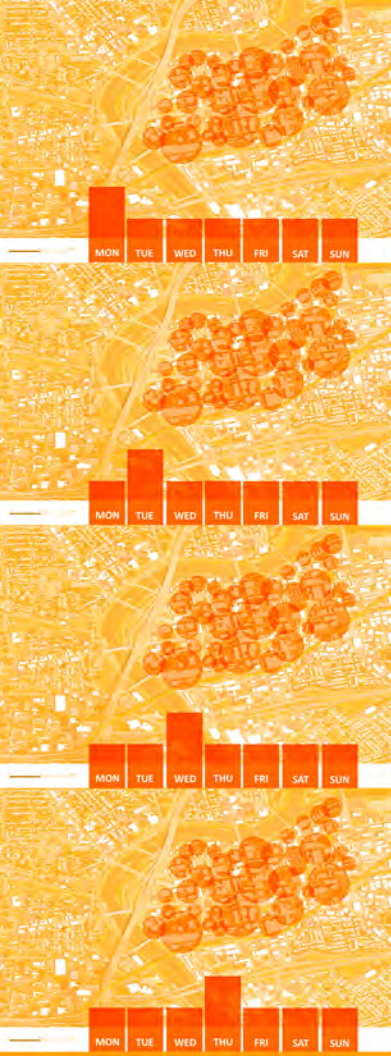


Diagram 2:
Activity in Downtown Dayton during the week.

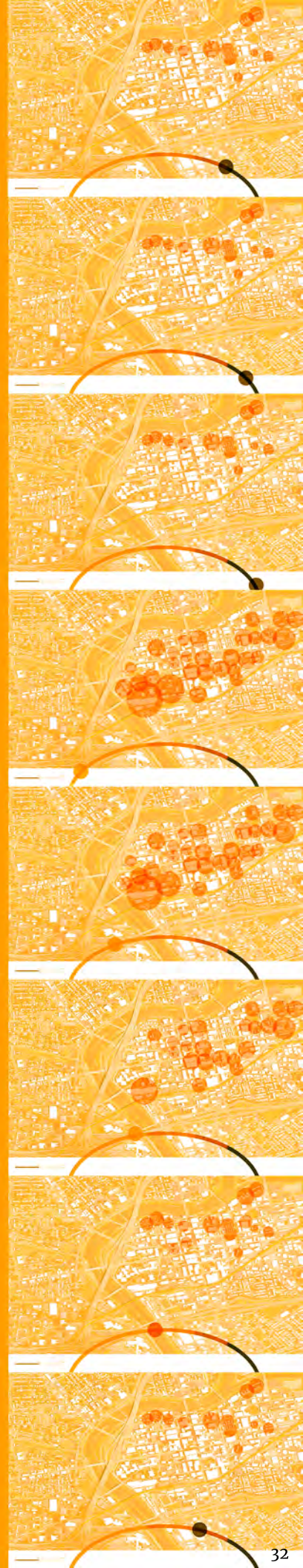
Dayton's downtown is home to many historically significant buildings and landmarks, which serve as reminders of the city's rich industrial and cultural heritage. However, many of these structures are endangered, suffering from neglect and underuse. Vacant and deteriorating, these buildings represent a missed opportunity to celebrate and preserve Dayton's history while integrating it into a vision for the city's future. The irregular distribution of these underutilized spaces punctuates the city with abrupt gaps, creating a fragmented urban landscape. These transitional spaces, while seemingly disruptive, embody a unique potential for transformation. Their very nature as "in-between" areas positions them as opportunities for reconnection and renewal. By reimagining these spaces, Dayton can create a cohesive urban network that honors its past while embracing contemporary needs and aspirations.

Activity Patterns in Downtown Dayton



Downtown Dayton experiences uneven activity patterns throughout the day and the week. During office hours on weekdays, the area remains relatively active, as workers occupy office buildings and businesses operate. However, after office hours, the downtown quickly becomes lifeless, with minimal activity due to a lack of amenities or spaces designed to draw people in during leisure hours. Similarly, while weekdays see a modicum of vibrancy, the weekends highlight the stark absence of engagement. Without events, attractions, or gathering spaces to sustain activity, the downtown area becomes notably quiet, reflecting the limitations of its current infrastructure. Addressing these patterns is central to the vision of reactivating urban voids, aiming to create a more dynamic and consistent urban experience.

Diagram 3:
Activity in Downtown Dayton during the Day



Site Analysis: The Dayton Union Station

The Dayton Union Station site, positioned at a pivotal downtown node, holds a unique geographic and historical significance within the urban fabric. While the original station was demolished in 1979, remnants such as the elevated train tracks remain, marking its legacy as a critical transportation hub. The site is surrounded by key landmarks, including Sinclair University, the Great Miami Riverfront, the Dayton Convention Center, Levitt Pavilion, and various playgrounds and stadiums. Despite its central location, the site is underutilized, serving as a reminder of Dayton's transition from a thriving industrial city to one searching for renewal.

Currently, the area is characterized by its fragmented and transitional nature. The elevated tracks, two of which remain operational while the others lie abandoned, form an unusual juxtaposition of activity and decay. Overgrown vegetation intersperses with structural remnants, creating a sense of disconnection that echoes the broader challenges of the downtown area. The site's adjacency to vibrant cultural and educational nodes offers immense potential for reactivation, yet its current state emphasizes the gaps in cohesion and integration within the city's core.

Image 21:
A contrast between the current and the old condition of the site

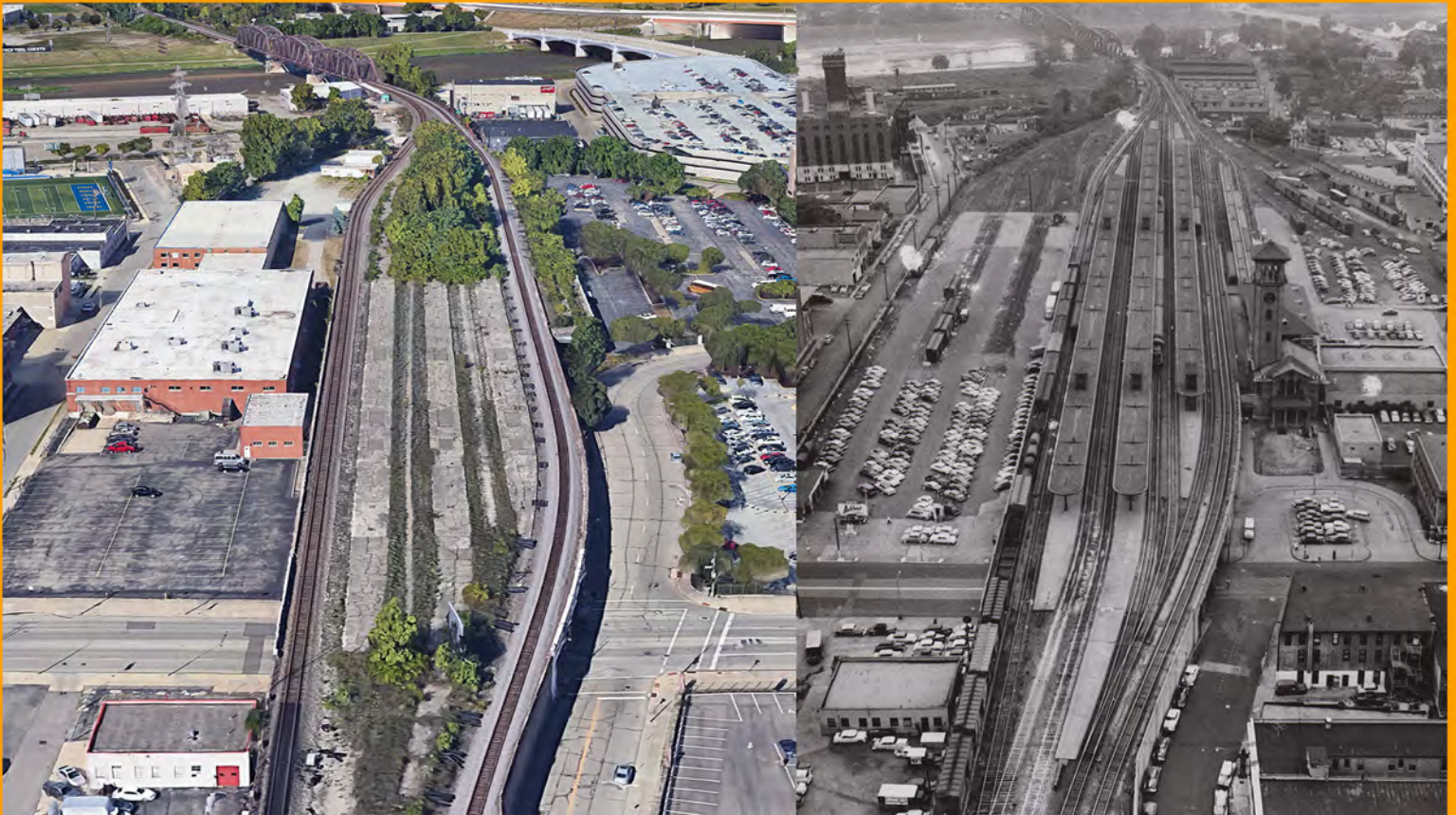




Diagram 4:
Perspective Site Analysis
showing the
neighboring **Site Forces**.



Diagram 5:
Site Analysis
showing the
neighboring **Site Forces**.

CLOSE TO RIVER

PARKING AREA SURROUNDS THE SPACE

CLOSE TO INSTITUTIONAL AREA

PROXIMITY TO THE BUSINESSES

ABANDONED RAILWAY STATION

ABANDONED BUILDINGS

VOID SPACE

VOID SPACE

CAN BE CONNECTED WITH EXISTING OPEN SPACES



06

STITCHING THE CITY

**A VISION TO INTEGRATE
THE VOIDS OF DAYTON**

THE ROUTE OF REFLECTION

The Route of Reflection

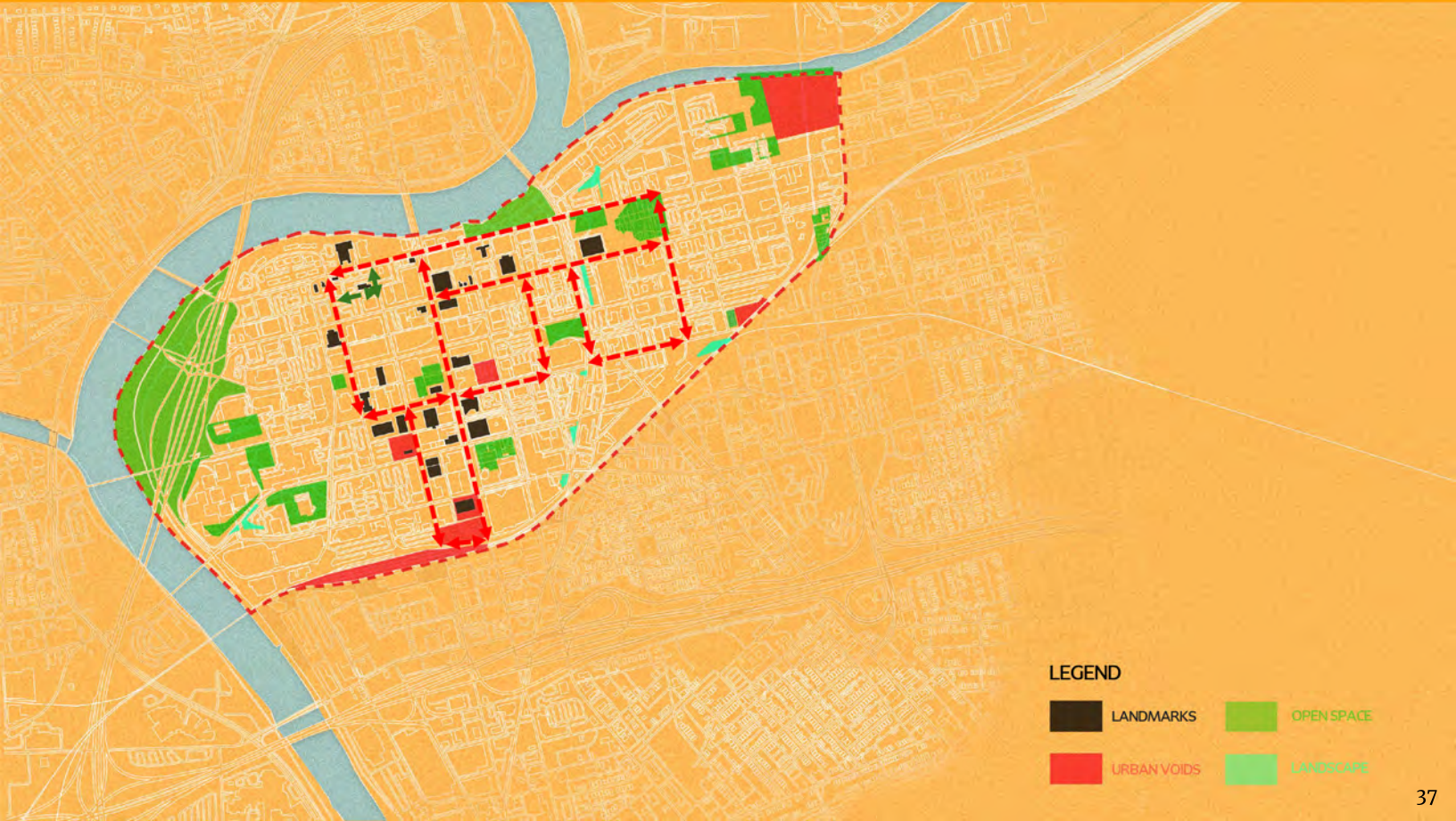
To transform these voids into meaningful spaces, this thesis proposes a "Route of Reflection" — a network of interconnected voids throughout downtown Dayton. The concept stems from the unique character of the downtown area, where spaces tell a fragmented yet rich story of the city's evolution. By connecting these voids, the "Route of Reflection" seeks to weave together Dayton's layered urban narrative, encouraging moments of pause, introspection, and engagement. This initiative aligns with the broader objective of creating a cohesive urban network that balances Dayton's historical legacy with contemporary needs, transforming underutilized spaces into hubs

of activity and connection.

This network will link key void spaces and landmark buildings, creating areas for withdrawal and observation. But what should form the basis of this network?

The foundation of this network lies not only in Dayton's landmark buildings but also in spaces that hold value beyond official recognition. While Dayton has many architecturally, historically, and functionally significant structures that shape the city's identity, other, less recognized spaces — some vacant, abandoned, or underutilized — hold unique potential for connecting people and creating nodes of activity.

Diagram 6:
The Route of Reflection



These spaces can serve as focal points for urban life, offering pathways and connections that reflect a deeper, more inclusive understanding of value within Dayton's layout.

By using these landmark buildings as anchors, we can begin to stitch together the surrounding voids into a cohesive network of public spaces. These reimagined voids become extensions of the

Manhattan—allowing people to gaze at the city from a step removed while still being part of it—this network of spaces can create a unique grammar for Dayton. Here, people can find a quiet moment of solace within themselves or with the city, transforming the urban voids into places of reflection and connection.



Diagram 7:
The Route of Reflection

landmarks, creating a fluid experience between the city's architectural heritage and its modern-day public realm. My goal is to provide spaces that invite new interpretations of the city, encouraging fresh interactions and connections among residents. Similar to how the High Line in New York offers a vantage point overlooking the busy life of

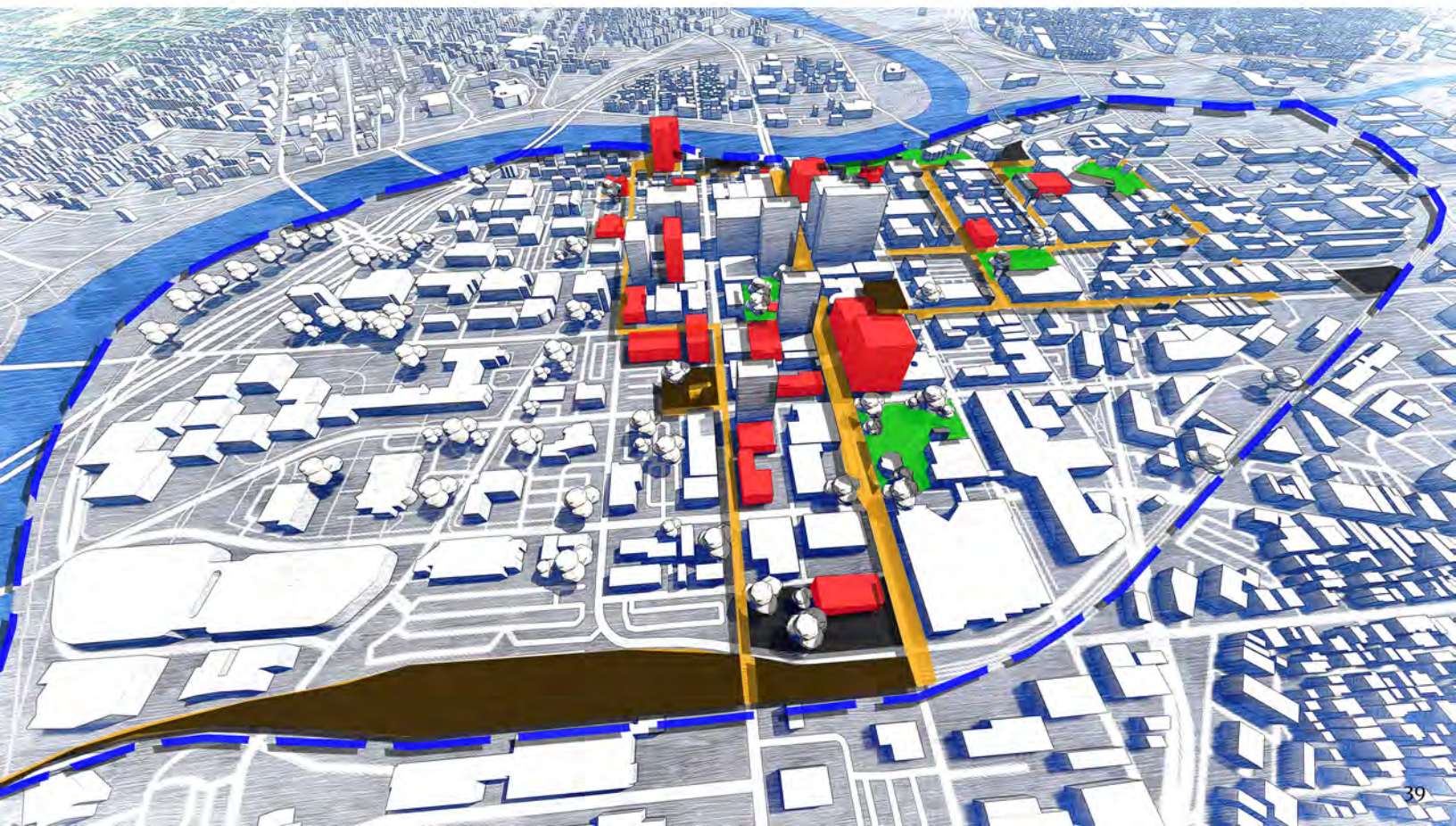
The Route of Reflection is conceived as more than a connective path—it is a spatial and emotional strategy for repairing the fragmented narrative of downtown Dayton. In a city where disjointed parcels, empty lots, and neglected corners have slowly eroded the sense of continuity and place, this route offers an intentional framework for reconnection. It weaves together dispersed spaces into a coherent urban experience that acknowledges both the physical landscape and the layered memories embedded within it.

Rather than proposing a rigid intervention, the route allows for flexibility, accommodating diverse forms of interaction—movement, pause, observation, and gathering. As

individuals traverse this network, they encounter a sequence of moments that invite reflection, spark curiosity, and promote engagement with the surrounding city. The path becomes an invitation to notice what is typically overlooked, to restore meaning where it has faded, and to reimagine the role of public space in urban life.

Through careful spatial sequencing, the Route of Reflection reintegrates marginalized spaces into the city's collective rhythm. It emphasizes slowness in a culture of speed, openness in areas of exclusion, and intentionality in a landscape shaped by neglect.

*Diagram 8:
The Route of Reflection*





07

THE VOIDS

Reading the Landscape of Voids: Conditions of Absence in Downtown Dayton

Downtown Dayton, like many post-industrial American cities, bears the imprint of shifting economies, evolving infrastructures, and population decline. What remains is a landscape marked by absence—spaces that have fallen out of formal use, slipped through the logic of zoning, or been bypassed by development. These voids, while often overlooked, form a crucial part of the city’s spatial and cultural identity. They are not singular in type or meaning but emerge in different forms, each shaped by the forces of time, function, and neglect. To move toward a design intervention, it is first necessary to examine these

voids not as a collective absence, but as distinct spatial conditions with names, logics, and latent possibilities.

The following typologies — asphalt seas, wild pockets, underlines, abandoned infrastructures, and ghost frames — represent a taxonomy of voids that recur throughout downtown Dayton. Each reflects a different kind of vacancy, and together they form the fragmented framework through which the city can be read, and ultimately reimagined.

Diagram 9:
The Different Kinds of Urban Voids in Dayton.

ALL THE SPACES-IN-BETWEEN

The Different Kinds of Urban Voids in Downtown Dayton



1. ASPHALT SEAS

Vast, Exposed Surface Parking Lots



2. GHOST GROUNDS

Vascent and Abandoned Lots



3. WILD POCKETS

Overgrown or Green voids



4. UNDERLINES

Infrastructure-Adjacent Voids



5. LINEAR ECHOES

Disused Rail/ Transit Corridors



6. GHOST FRAMES

Abandoned Buildings, Landmark Buildings, Disintegrated Buildings



Asphalt Seas

Perhaps the most immediately visible form of urban void in Dayton is the vast expanse of surface parking lots. Referred to here as asphalt seas, these areas cover entire blocks with impermeable blacktop, offering minimal pedestrian interaction and no contribution to civic life. Their scale disrupts walkability and erases the spatial continuity between buildings, creating visual and social gaps. These voids are the physical manifestation of a car-centered planning paradigm—spaces that prioritize storage over engagement, function over presence. Despite their utilitarian purpose, they present a blank slate for reintegration into the city's public realm.

Wild Pockets

In contrast to the stark flatness of the asphalt seas, wild pockets are spaces where nature has begun to reclaim the urban grid. Often fenced off, overgrown, or unofficially “off-limits,” these parcels suggest a quieter form of resistance. Grasses, weeds, and small trees grow untamed, erasing traces of previous human intervention. These spaces challenge conventional ideas of order and control in the city, introducing ecological succession into the heart of downtown. Their unstructured beauty invites a different reading—one that embraces spontaneity, biodiversity, and the poetic dimension of abandonment.

Image 22:
*Two Different Urban Voids—
The Asphalt Seas and the Wild Pockets*





Image 23:
The Linear Echoes of Dayton

Underlines

Beneath Dayton's overpasses and along the edges of elevated infrastructure lie the underlines—spaces that are shaped not by buildings, but by the voids infrastructure leaves behind. Dark, loud, and often unwelcoming, these residual spaces lack definition and program. They are zones of passage rather than destinations. Yet their centrality within the urban grid and

proximity to pedestrian pathways make them critical junctures. When reimagined, these underlines can shift from places of disconnect to nodes of transition—thresholds that bridge neighborhoods, anchor civic life, and hold new kinds of activity.

Linear Echoes

Throughout downtown, remnants of Dayton's industrial and civic past still stand, hollowed out by time. These abandoned infrastructures—be they old factories, transit facilities, or public service buildings—once served vital functions in the city's ecosystem. Today, they exist in stasis: structurally present but socially absent. These buildings are not ruins in the romantic

Image 24:
The Underlines of Dayton



Ghost Frames

Perhaps the most emotionally charged of Dayton's voids are the ghost frames—historic or landmark buildings that still stand, yet exist on the brink of erasure. Often visually prominent, these structures may retain their facades while their interiors are vacant, decaying, or inaccessible. They speak to memory, identity, and the precariousness of legacy. These voids are not merely spatial but psychological—representing both potential and loss. As urban figures, ghost frames possess a haunting presence, demanding recognition and care in any future urban vision.

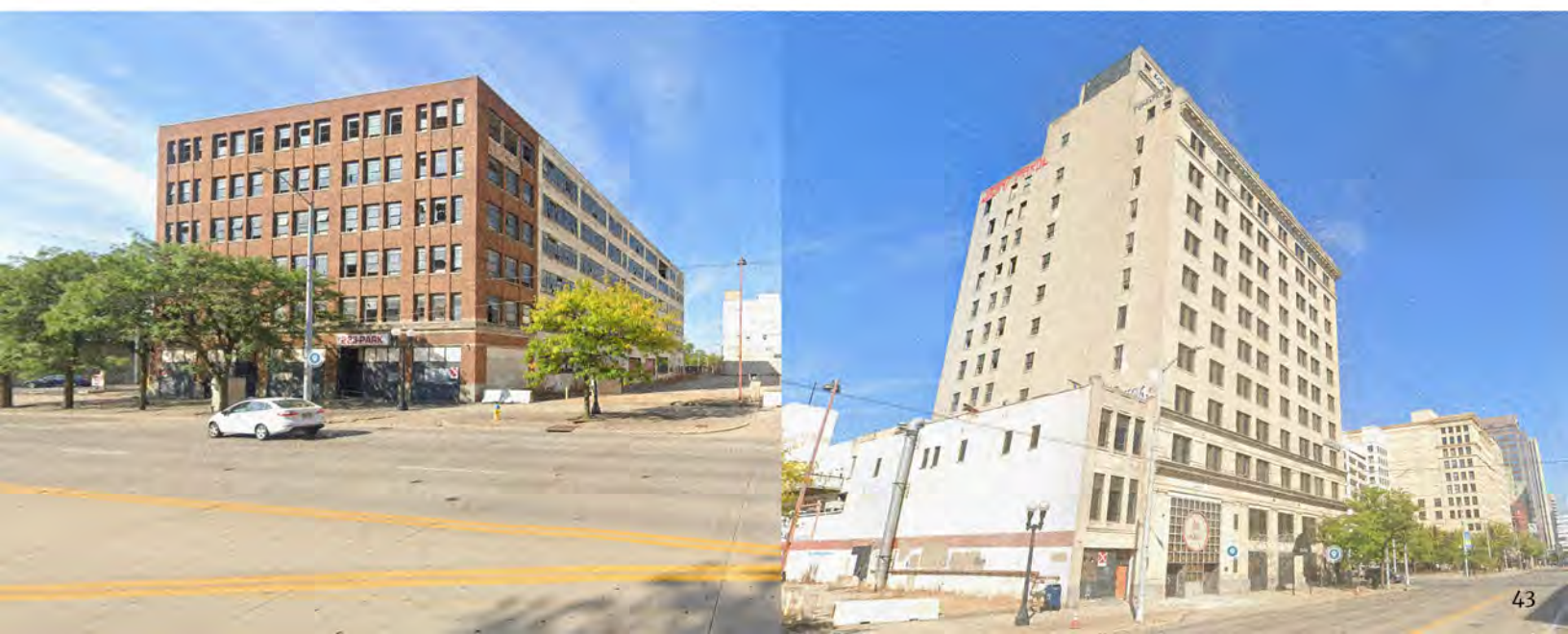
Ghost Grounds

Distinct from ghost frames—which still physically stand—ghost grounds refer to

the spaces where buildings or infrastructures once existed but have since been completely removed. These are erasures in the urban landscape: plots of land that hold no vertical trace of what came before, but remain imprinted with memory, form, or invisible boundaries. Often left as gravel lots, fenced areas, or ambiguous open fields, ghost grounds carry a sense of disorientation. They lack architectural markers but are saturated with historical and emotional weight—sites where past presences still echo in the absence of form.

By identifying and examining these six distinct typologies—asphalt seas, wild pockets, underlines, abandoned infrastructures, ghost frames, and ghost grounds—a more nuanced understanding of Dayton's urban voids emerges. These are not homogenous

Image 25:
The Ghost Frames of Dayton



spaces of lack or failure, but layered conditions shaped by history, infrastructure, nature, and neglect. Each type tells a different story about the city's evolution and offers a different kind of opportunity for engagement.

To transform these spaces, one must first recognize them as active components of the urban fabric—each with its own constraints and potentials. Rather than erasing their identities, the goal is to work with their specificity, interpreting them not as empty gaps, but as fragments of a larger narrative waiting to be woven back into the city. These readings form the foundation for the next phase of this thesis: proposing a framework through which these voids can be stitched into a meaningful, reflective, and inclusive urban experience.



08

RE-IMAGINING THE VOID

From Framework to Site: A Ground for Transformation

While the Route of Reflection offers a compelling conceptual framework for re-engaging with the fragmented landscape of downtown Dayton, its effectiveness ultimately relies on its application at the level of the site. Conceptual thinking alone cannot resolve the physical, social, and emotional complexities embedded in urban voids. The transformation of space requires a deliberate and contextual design response—one that tests the framework's intentions through spatial intervention.

To explore this, a site has been selected that embodies multiple layers of vacancy and potential. Situated at the former Dayton Union Station, the site combines three distinct void conditions: extensive surface parking lots, infrastructural remnants, and overgrown, unmanaged land. These elements—referred to in earlier chapters as asphalt seas, linear echoes, and wild pockets—exist in close proximity, forming a contiguous but fragmented terrain in the heart of downtown.

This site represents more than just a place of physical vacancy; it is a point of convergence for memory, infrastructure, and missed opportunity. Its centrality within the urban fabric and adjacency to key

cultural, educational, and civic institutions enhance its potential as a transformative ground. The following chapter analyzes the site's context, spatial forces, and user dynamics, and proposes a design strategy that integrates transit, public gathering, and contemplation. Through this intervention, the site becomes a prototype for how voids—when thoughtfully reimaged—can be reinserted into the city's rhythm as places of layered meaning and shared experience.

THE MASTERPLAN



LEGEND

TECHNICAL SPACES

- 1. RTA INFORMATION DESK
- 2. BUS PASSENGER WAITING AREA
- 3. TICKET SALES
- 4. MALE WASHROOM
- 5. FEMALE WASHROOM
- 6. BUS LOADING CURB
- 7. BUS TEMPORARY PARKING
- 8. DRIVERS' LOCKER ROOMS
- 9. MALE DRIVERS' WASHROOM
- 10. FEMALE DRIVERS' WASHROOM
- 11. DRIVERS' WAITING AREA
- 12. CAFETERIA

- 13. SKATEBOARDING ARENA
- 14. LOCKER ROOMS
- 15. CHANGING ROOMS
- 16. GREAT MIAMI TRAIL INFORMATION & SOUVENIR SHOP
- 17. BIKE REPAIRING WORKSHOP
- 18. BIKE RENTALS
- 19. PUBLIC MALE WASHROOM
- 20. PUBLIC FEMALE WASHROOM

CREATIVE SPACES

- THE SKETCH NEST (ARTIST ZONE)
- 2. FLOATGRID
- 3. THE TANGLE GARDEN
- 4. THE OVERLOOK (RESTAURANT & DECK)
- 5. GRIDGROUND (PUBLIC PLAZA)
- THE GARDEN OF PAUSE (SCULPTURE GARDEN)
- 7. STEPSCAPES
- 8. THE BREATHING EDGE

THE MASTERPLAN:

The Technical Spaces

The design intervention at the former Dayton Union Station aims to transform a layered urban void into a breathing hub—a space that fosters both movement and reflection. Rather than imposing a new object onto the site, the proposal allows it to reemerge from within the city's fabric, acknowledging its infrastructural and ecological layers. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's theory of latent "use value" in neglected spaces and Michel de Certeau's ideas on spatial practice, the intervention embraces everyday life as a generative force in urban renewal.

The site is organized into two primary zones based on acoustic and spatial character. The noisy underside of the elevated tracks houses technical functions, including a regional bus hub serving local and interstate travel. This hub is equipped with amenities for students and commuters, as well as designated rest areas for drivers—responding to a current gap in the city's infrastructure during large events and festivals. Above and around this core, quieter zones are designed for social interaction and contemplation.

To activate public life, the proposal includes a skateboard park—leveraging nearby sports

fields and the growing urban skateboarding culture—as well as a bicycle rental and repair station. These elements are linked to the Great Miami River Trail, making the site a key node within Dayton's recreational network. A visitor kiosk and souvenir shop further embed the project into the city's cultural and ecological flows.

Together, these interventions reframe the void as a dynamic threshold—a place where infrastructure, culture, and daily movement intersect, breathing life back into a forgotten site.

THE MASTERPLAN:

The Grid Folly

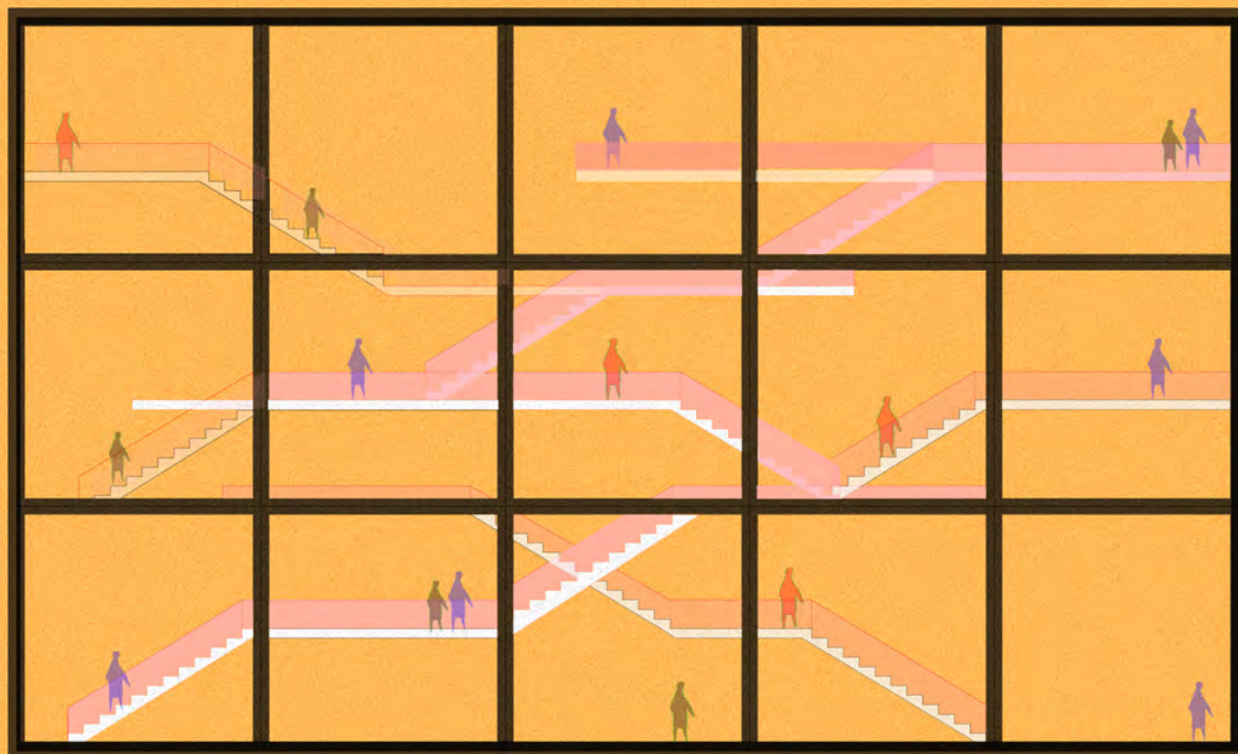
At the heart of the proposed intervention lies the Grid Folly—a spatial framework that redefines how visitors experience the site. Rather than serving as a traditional architectural enclosure, the grid acts as an open, layered system that frames space without confining it. Inspired by Kevin Lynch's theories on mental mapping and the personal construction of urban meaning, the folly encourages users to navigate the site intuitively, forming their own narratives through movement, pause, and observation.

The grid is not a singular object but a collection of modular segments that vary in openness, height, and orientation. These shifting conditions generate a multiplicity of spatial

experiences, allowing each visitor to engage with the site differently depending on where they stand or move. The structure avoids prescriptive circulation, instead inviting exploration through ambiguity and variation. In doing so, the Grid Folly becomes a scaffold for perception—guiding without dictating.

As time passes, this framework is envisioned to evolve through use, weathering, and adaptation. It becomes more than a spatial device; it transforms into a living canvas for the city—a site where memories, events, and encounters are continually inscribed. By resisting closure and embracing openness, the folly challenges conventional ideas of monumentality or fixed

Diagram 10:
Conceptual Drawing of the Grid Folly



programming. Instead, it establishes a participatory environment where meaning is not designed in advance, but discovered over time through interaction and personal connection.

Ultimately, the Grid Folly forms the experiential core of the breathing hub—an armature that binds the technical and contemplative zones while offering a continuously unfolding encounter with the city.

**THE
MASTERPLAN:**
The Creative Realm



The GridGround
(Public Plaza)

Stepscales
(Stairs)

The Breathing Edge
(Green Garden)

The Overlook
(Restaurant and Viewing Deck)

The Tangled Garden
(Children's Play Zone)

The Sketchnest
(Artist Zone)

FloatGrid
(Elevated Mesh Walkway)

THE MASTERPLAN: The Creative Realm

The Grid Folly, while appearing as an abstract framework, is deliberately embedded with spatial logic and intent. Each grid segment is designed to hold its own micro-narrative, guiding visitors through various physical and emotional experiences. This is achieved through a network of “stepscales” — carefully placed stairways that weave through the structure. These stairs are not merely functional; they are spatial storytellers, directing the body, shifting perspectives, and offering moments of pause or redirection. They organize vertical movement while maintaining openness, allowing the journey within the grid to remain non-linear and exploratory.

Among these journeys, certain spaces are carved out for specific uses. One such space is the Sketch Nest—an informal, creative zone inspired by local artists who gather to draw, share stories, and reinterpret the city through sketches. The Sketch Nest provides a sheltered, collaborative environment for drawing workshops, installations, and public engagement. It is a direct response to Dayton’s cultural character, fostering grassroots creativity within the evolving urban framework.

Above the site, the FloatGrid offers a playful layer of elevation—a mesh walkway that

*Image 26:
The Sketchnest*





Image 27:
The Sketchnest



Image 28:
The Floatgrid

hovers above the primary grid and invites people to move across it with a heightened sense of interaction. This elevated pathway allows users to observe the spaces below, creating a dialogue between levels. Transparency and layering become key experiential tools, enabling a multiplicity of visual and social encounters.

These vertical strategies culminate in the GridGround, a public plaza situated at the most socially active node of the site. Designed to host public events, performances, and cultural gatherings, the GridGround transforms the formerly silent void into a vibrant social condenser. It balances formal programming with informal occupation, offering space for both curated activities and spontaneous gathering.

Surrounding this energy are additional interventions that expand the site's inclusivity. The Tangled Garden introduces an interactive, child-friendly space defined by suspended ropes and soft climbing elements. It is designed as an imaginative landscape—physically stimulating and psychologically freeing—allowing children to explore and engage the grid on their own terms.

Adjacent to this is the Overlook, a rooftop restaurant and viewing deck that invites slower forms of engagement. Visitors can dine while observing the city, the flowing movement of people across the grid, or the rhythmic passage of cargo trains. The space is intentionally

*Image 29:
The GridGround*



placed to bridge activity and reflection, offering a moment of stillness and perspective amid the dynamic spatial choreography.

Central to the contemplative dimension of the design is the Garden of Pause—a sculptural courtyard where temporary art installations and local exhibitions can unfold. The space is envisioned as both a gallery and a meditative sanctuary. It also responds to institutional proximity, supporting programming from Sinclair University’s drone research and design efforts. This overlapping of artistic and academic use ensures that the space remains dynamic, community-oriented, and temporally responsive.

Encircling the entire site is the Breathing Edge—a contemplative walking path that coils softly around the perimeter. Designed to accommodate slow, solitary movement, the pathway narrows at key points to encourage intimacy and quiet observation. It resists the conventional boundary by becoming a space in itself—buffering the inner activities while connecting them with the surrounding city fabric.

Beyond daylight activity, the site embraces transformation through time. As evening sets in, the Grid Folly adopts a new character. Under the soft illumination of lampposts, the

geometry becomes poetic—casting long shadows and giving the structure a dreamlike presence. Movement slows, sounds soften, and the grid holds stories in stillness. The same spatial elements that energize the day now foster reflection at night.

The elevated rail tracks that divide the site contribute further to this duality. Two of the four lines remain operational, while the other two—long overtaken by wild vegetation—have been preserved as a contrasting wilderness within the design. Rather than clearing them, the project integrates these naturalized areas as a quiet backdrop. Their untamed condition reminds visitors that not all spaces must be controlled to be meaningful.

Sectional drawings illustrate how these different layers interweave—providing spaces for action and quietude, openness and enclosure, elevation and grounding. The site is not a singular gesture, but a complex system of experiences that shift across time and user intention.

This approach reimagines the void as both a spatial and temporal construct. It acknowledges that transformation is not static but continually unfolding. By proposing a design that accommodates multiplicity—of use, of mood, and of meaning—the project puts

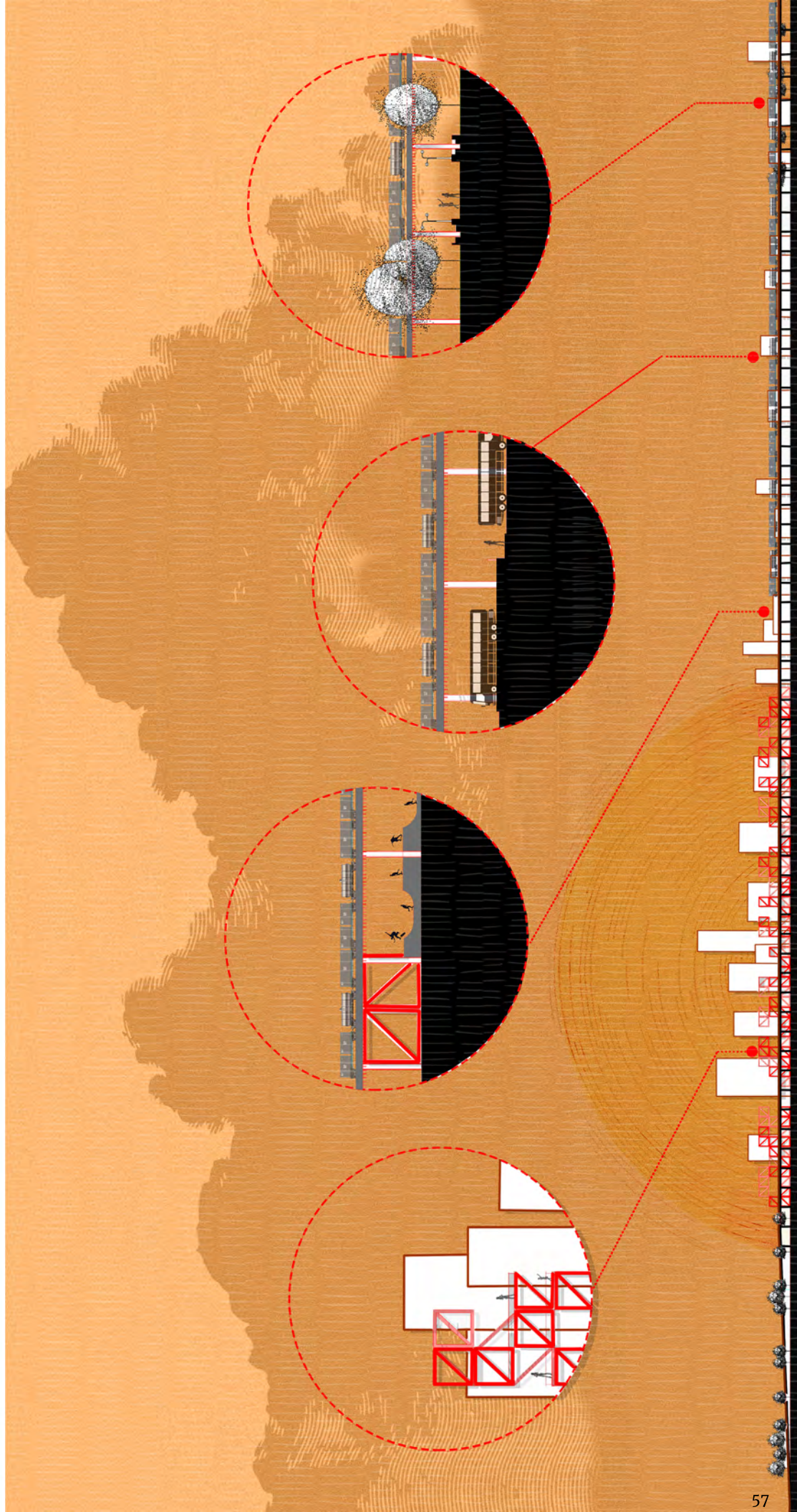


Image 30:
A Longitudinal Section of the Site

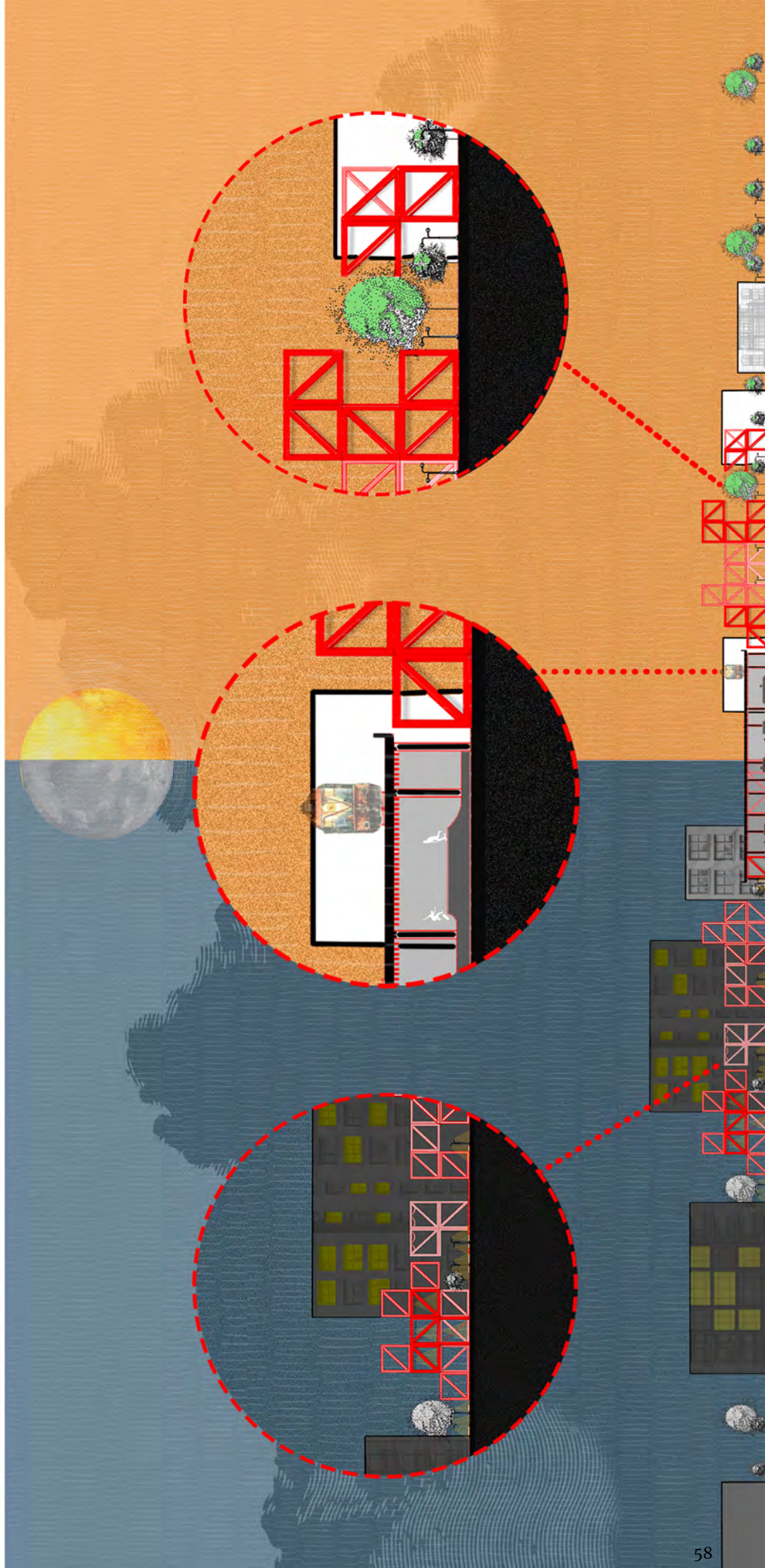


Image 31:
A Transverse Section of the Site

forward a replicable model for other voids in Dayton and beyond.

It concludes with a call to perception: these spaces, often bypassed or neglected, hold untold potential. When treated with care, they are not merely places of absence but powerful grounds for presence, memory, and future authorship.

This thesis began with a deceptively simple question: What if the neglected voids within our cities are not signs of failure, but opportunities for new forms of presence? Through the lens of downtown Dayton, this work has examined how overlooked and underutilized spaces—often seen as fragments—can be reframed as vital components of the urban experience.

Drawing from critical theories of spatial practice, urban memory, and psychogeography, the thesis has proposed a conceptual framework—the Route of Reflection—to guide the transformation of these voids. This route is not simply a physical path, but a strategic method for reconnecting spatial, emotional, and cultural discontinuities. It is designed to cultivate both activity and contemplation, encouraging users to move through the city with heightened awareness and personal authorship.

The design intervention at the former Dayton Union Station

site served as a testbed for this framework. Through layered programming, experiential structures such as the Grid Folly, and the careful choreography of public and intimate spaces, the project reclaims the void not as absence, but as a dynamic field of interaction. It accommodates infrastructure, supports public life, invites artistic engagement, and protects solitude—demonstrating that a single intervention can hold multitudes.

Ultimately, this thesis argues for a shift in how cities approach vacancy—not as something to be filled, but as something to be revealed, respected, and reimagined. Urban voids are not empty. They are spaces of potential, memory, and future authorship. When designed with care and intention, they can offer not only new public spaces but new ways of seeing the city itself.



09

**REFLECTIONS
ON PRESENTATION,
PROCESS, AND PLACE**



The final thesis presentation served as a meaningful culmination of months of research, design exploration, and personal investment. Presenting the project before a jury, fellow peers, and an engaged audience—many of whom were residents of Dayton—provided a unique and valuable moment of validation and insight. The presence of Daytonians in the audience allowed for direct feedback from those who live the realities the thesis seeks to address. Their reactions, questions, and reflections brought a deeper resonance to the work and affirmed the relevance of the project within its intended context.

This moment of public presentation was not merely a conclusion, but a turning point that reinforced the importance of grounding theoretical exploration in lived experience. Throughout the thesis journey, multiple site visits were made, during which time was spent observing, documenting, and engaging in conversations with people from Dayton. These experiences shaped the project in profound ways, revealing nuances that could not be captured from afar.

Equally instrumental were the committee members and the ongoing conversations that unfolded throughout the semester. Their critical guidance, challenges, and encouragement continuously sharpened the thesis, giving it both structure and direction. The dialogues during reviews provided clarity at crucial junctures and opened up new pathways of thinking that enriched the final outcome.

In the end, the final presentation was not only a showcase of design—it was a reflective moment that acknowledged the collaborative, iterative, and place-based nature of the entire thesis process. It underscored the significance of listening—to cities, to people, and to the silences in between—and affirmed the power of architecture to respond meaningfully to the conditions of urban life.

