University of Cincinnati

Date: 3/28/2011

I, Alissa N Weaver, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture in Architecture (Master of).

It is entitled:
Urban Surface: Improving Identity through Formal & Social Connections in Toledo, OH

Student's name: Alissa N Weaver

This work and its defense approved by:

Committee chair: George Bible, MCivEng

Committee chair: Michael McInturf, MARCH
Urban Surface:
Improving Identity through Formal & Social Connections in Toledo, OH

A thesis submitted
to the Graduate School
of the University of Cincinnati
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

in the School of Architecture and Interior Design
in the College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning

2011

by

Alissa Weaver
B.S. Arch, University of Cincinnati, 2009

First Committee Chair: Tom Bible
Second Committee Chair: Michael McInturf
The cores of America’s aging industrial cities have declined. With the rise of the suburbs, the substance of these cities – people, spontaneity, exchange, and interaction – has migrated outward from the central core. As a result of this migration and its corresponding disinvestment, these cities suffer from a weakened urban identity, manifested in negative perceptions and attitudes about these cities and their offerings. Identity for each city is a projection of meaning that accompanies an individual’s interpretation of its environment. Because projected meanings vary based on the individual, meaning is not the focus of this thesis; instead, this thesis asserts that in order to strengthen a city’s identity, the environment – both built and unbuilt – must change to allow for increasingly positive perceptions and attitudes.

Changes in the unbuilt environment influence a city’s geographic identity – its topography, climate, and resources; whereas, changes in the built environment influence a city’s urban identity – its daily flows and social interactions. For many aging industrial cities, the only enduring symbol of the unbuilt environment is a major waterway, a transportation channel that coincided with the city’s beginnings; the datum against which built interventions are measured. At the waterfront, where landscape, urbanism, and architecture intersect, design must respond with flexibility, enabling current social interactions and anticipating future uses. The methodology for creating this dynamic urban landscape requires formal strategies that challenge the functionalism that formed these cities, allowing for spaces with multiple programs and functions, both known and anticipated. The thesis design proposal attempts to create a dynamic urban waterfront in Toledo, Ohio, reorienting the downtown to the Maumee River and connecting existing assets to a web of new interaction. The design approach uses Alex Wall’s surface strategies: thickening, folding, new materials, nonprogrammed use, impermanence, and movement – to incorporate a new program of housing and entertainment spaces within the existing context and provide for new social interaction along Toledo’s waterfront. The resultant intervention must connect people to the waterfront, improve access to the river’s edge, allow for previously unplanned social interaction, and promote an increasingly positive perception of Toledo.

I would like to thank my family for all of their love and support. In addition, a special thanks to Tom Bible and Michael McInturf, my thesis advisors, who led me down the long road from my initial idea to final presentation. This is as much a result of their guidance as it is my own progress. And a final thanks to Toledo, my hometown, which has transformed in my eyes from “one of those things you’re born into” to a wonderful, though misunderstood, city.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract

Images & Illustrations List

**Part I: Identity**

- 01_Introduction 11
- 02_Urban Identity 13
  - Defining Identity
  - Formal Structures
  - Social Structures

**Part II: Formal & Social Connection**

- 03_Landscape: Datum: Enduring Identity 18
  - Waterfront as Landscape
  - Waterfront as Datum
  - Waterfront as Enduring Identity
  - Conceptualizing Changes to the Waterfront

- 04_City: Connector: Evolving Identity 26
  - Formal Connection
  - Social Connection
  - Intersection & Integration
  - Dynamic Urban Surface

- 05_Precedents: Surface Strategies 30
  - Thickening
  - Folding
  - New Materials
  - Nonprogrammed Use
  - Impermanence

**Part III: Toledo**

- 06_Toledo: An Introduction 43
- 07_Select Identities 44
  - The Great Black Swamp
  - The Glass City
  - Toledo ♥ JEEP

- 08_Proposed Site 51

Bibliography
IMAGES & ILLUSTRATIONS LIST

Part I: Identity

01. Introduction
01.03 Weaver, Alissa. Personal Photograph. 10 Oct. 2010.

02. Urban Identity
02.01 Weaver, Alissa. Personal Photograph. 16 June 2008.
02.02 Weaver, Alissa. Personal Photograph. 10 Oct. 2010.
02.03 Weaver, Alissa. Personal Photograph. 25 Aug. 2008.
02.04 Weaver, Alissa. Personal Photograph. 23 June 2008.

Part II: Formal & Social Connection

03. Landscape: Datum: Enduring Identity
03.04 Weaver, Alissa. Personal Photograph. 10 Oct. 2010.
03.06 Weaver, Alissa. Personal Photograph. 16 Mar. 2011.
03.07 Weaver, Alissa. Personal Photograph. 16 Mar. 2011.

04. City: Connector: Evolving Identity
04.02 Cook, Diane and Len Jenshel. “Miracle Above Manhattan.”
05.05 Russell, James S. “Weiss/Manfredi Evoked a Geology Shaped by Water to Help the Museum of the Earth Tell the 4.6 Billion Year History of the Planet.” Architectural Record 192.1 (Jan. 2004): 112-117.
05.15 Weaver, Alissa. Personal Photograph. 21 Aug. 2009.

Part III: Toledo

07.01 Weaver, Alissa. “Black Swamp Geography.” 2011.


07.08 Weaver, Alissa. Personal Photograph. 3 Feb. 2009.


PART I: IDENTITY
INTRODUCTION

The problem of urban deterioration stretches indiscriminately across the United States; however, aging industrial cities are in a greater state of decay than many other large American cities, which in turn weakens their identities. According to the Brookings Institute, older industrial cities are lagging behind their peers as they struggle to make a transition from an economy based on routine manufacturing to one based on knowledge-oriented activities. Indeed, these cities are often “dominated by low-wage employment sectors… slow (or no) employment and business growth, low incomes, high unemployment, diminishing tax bases and concentrated poverty.” For aging industrial cities, this economic transition was especially damaging because all their efforts were put into manufacturing. These cities built the largest factories and made names for themselves with their manufactured goods – Toledo became known as the “Glass City” and Detroit, the “Motor City” – and because of this strong identification with manufacturing their “signature” products, these cities were less likely to foster other industries. Now that these signature industries have faded, these cities must build an identity beyond that of their historic manufacturing roles. In order for these cities to actively shape their identities, they must take advantage of their assets and promote new uses for obsolete spaces.

In addition to the loss of their manufacturing identities, these cities have also lost their social identities. As inner-city neighborhoods declined and transportation networks improved, those with the means left the urban core for the suburbs, leaving cultural centers, historic buildings, and once-booming neighborhood businesses behind to crumble. Despite the displacement of those living in the city, the urban core maintained many centers for employment, typically in the form of office towers. However, because these cities were designed for efficient automobile transport, workers rarely interacted at street level or in the
Accordingly, Louis Mumford argues that suburbanization has created a “fundamental transformation of literal public space” because the private realm extends out from the house and into public space.\(^3\) Indeed, suburbanization promotes living in isolated, inwardly focused homes, driving in an “insulated” cars, and passing by other inwardly focused people, extending private space into places that are literally public.\(^4\) In order to revive the social interaction of the urban core, people must be enticed out of their “insulated” states and encouraged to interact with the urban environment. In order for this to occur, the urban surface must allow for dynamic connections and spaces for impermanence and appropriation.

---


\(^4\) Ibid., 8.
02 URBAN IDENTITY

Urban identity refers to the projection of meaning that a person assigns to an environment or its image. For Kevin Lynch, identity requires differentiation, meaning that a person knows a city in that it is different from other things. A person then assigns meaning to the identified city by arranging it within the world of all objects that he has seen or has experienced. This trio of “identity, structure, and meaning” make up the criteria by which any image may be analyzed. For example, a city can be different or similar from another city, a town, or a country; but also, on an extremely elementary level, a city can be different or similar to a jar of pickles or a puddle of water – the interpretation of a city finds meaning in each individual’s structure, or objects of comparison. Jean Baudrillard elaborates on the self-referential interpretation of meaning when he writes, “We are in what we see, we are what we see. Merged in the domain of the hypermediatic flux, the image turns into a powerful industrial communication system capable of producing cultural models and mass communication.”

---

Because meaning is highly individualized (and increasingly so with the speed of information transmission), a transformation of image and identity for the urban environment must focus not on meaning and interpretation, but on the environment’s physical structure and arrangement.

When altering the environment to promote urban identity, a designer is challenged with questions of how to interpret a city’s existing identity and how to determine which environments may be representative of that identity. Although meaning is individual, research shows that, “People living in the same city share viewpoints to a remarkable extent. As a result of unique local conditions, an identifiable set of opinions may dominate, and a special tone of the city may evolve.” The various groups are influenced by demographic factors as well as their experiences within the city; however, despite sharing an overall perception of the city’s tone, each group will feel differently about the best methods for improving the city. A designer’s critical role in this process is to design beyond the immediate future that these groups advocate, considering ways the city can adapt to unforeseen programs and flows.

Beyond the question of whose interpretation must be considered as “true” to the urban identity lies the issue of the appropriate response to transformation of that urban identity. When attempting to change urban identity, a tension exists between those groups who wish to build upon the existing identity and those who wish to invent a new identity:

Many advantages can be gained by discovering and reinforcing a city’s own identity. Small differences may be magnified, special events may be commemorated, … and many other motives may embolden efforts to undertake the quest for urban identity. Conversely, cities may wish to add spaces or improve existing spaces to become more like other cities; thus, they hope to meet the competition for new sites for corporations or to overcome negative images. … Designed from opposite perspectives, improving urban identity can result in similar or unusual spaces and places.

Within the context of aging industrial cities, a hybrid approach is necessary. To improve the city’s identity, the city must combine new programs with infrastructure improvements while still paying attention to the local materials and special events that make the city unique. The designer must reshape the urban landscape for future interpretations while remaining within the context of existing urban flows.


Ibid., 7.
When considering the creation of a new identity, it is important to design spaces for human engagement because identity is not created in a vacuum; identity requires relationships within social structures, not just formal structures. Within the city, people interpret places as having first formal, then social structures; however, it is the social structures that bind us to a place:

Interpretation, with all the risks it implies, is what we all accomplish every day when we use places. Becoming familiar with a place not only means walking through its streets, memorizing itineraries, but also going beyond the barrier of the streetscape into buildings and engaging with its people. ... Any unfamiliar city is first a collage of images before the visitor constructs a more integrated mental vision to structure the physical and social characteristics of the entire place. This necessity to infer social characteristics and values from physical appearances is an active and dynamic process which sustains and makes possible a future attachment to the place.9

In order to give tourists and other strangers a sense of the city’s identity, the physical environment must support a dynamic social environment. Lola Alvarez Bravo’s Architectural Anarchy of Mexico City (Image 02.07) offers a commentary on how modernity has altered the physical environment, which suggests that formal identity has become

---

primary, alienating the social environment. The image suggests that the transformation of the built environment inhibits social connection in favor of formal image. However, the formal image promoted shows icons of modernity rather than dynamic social life. Daily social activities, such as walking one’s dog or eating lunch at a street café, seem nearly impossible at the base of the twisted towers. The dynamic connections within the new urban landscape must mix the living, working, and social functions, rather than focusing on merely formal image, in order to allow visitors to experience the city’s identity.

In conclusion, to improve urban identity with design, improvements in the physical environment must consider many factors. First, design must considering ways the city can embrace the constant change, providing a framework to absorb unforeseen programs and flows. Second, the city must blend the similarities of the existing with the unique qualities of the new. This hybrid approach combines new uses and flows with the existing uses and flows to foster connection. Finally, the design must mix the living, working, and social functions in order to allow visitors and residents to engage in a shared identity.
PART II: FORMAL & SOCIAL CONNECTION
America’s aging industrial cities share a common feature: a waterfront. Detroit is located on the Detroit River; Cincinnati & Louisville: the Ohio River; Pittsburgh: the confluence of the Allegheny, Ohio, Monongahela Rivers; Chicago & Milwaukee: Lake Michigan; Cleveland & Buffalo: Lake Erie; and Toledo is located on the Maumee River. The connection with this water was initially one of survival, but evolved to become one of exploitation:

Water has always been and continues to be the foundation of all social development. Alongside drinking water, water provided communities with fertile soil, with the opportunity to build roads, with energy to power hammers and mills, and with a means to dispose of their effluent. However, the most important function of rivers over the centuries has been as a transportation route for trade and shipping.¹⁰

This relationship with water, although not always mutually beneficial, fostered an enduring sense of identity for those who lived in these cities. “Settlements generally evolved in a particular area along the watercourse. … These natural lines then frequently evolved to become … borders – but also lines of connection linking … peoples and cities. This in turn caused … rivers to be seen as symbols of identity, forging close emotional ties which continue to bind people to rivers still today.”¹¹ Because these waterways transported not only goods, but also people, the view from the water to a city’s shoreline or dock infrastructure was the first view a visitor received. This first impression became a lasting impression. This historic connection of people to the identity of a place through the watercourse endures today.


¹¹ Ibid., 23.
Despite the advances in other modes of transportation, the historic link between a watercourse and a city’s identity endures today. The waterfront, as a landscape feature, symbolizes, for a city, qualities that are unique to its given location. The universal quality of many a contemporary building’s styles, techniques, and materials allows the regional landscape to play a greater role in defining the uniqueness of place. While the number of new highways or apartment blocks may forever climb, there will only be one river or lake. Because the watercourse provides a constant landscape element amidst change, it can be said that, “The aura of a city largely resides and endures along its waterfront, allowing substantial changes to occur without
inevitably harming its enduring qualities of place.” 

Not only does the waterfront play a key role in the enduring identity of a city, it also provides a city with one of its greatest opportunities to strengthen that identity. “The river and its banks are becoming a brand, a location factor, image enhancer, a landscape feature of cultural and historical significance and are taking on the erstwhile role of harbors as showcases and gateways to the world.” For an aging industrial city, the waterfront clearly goes beyond its historic significance to shape present day perceptions about its city. Because the adjacent river or lake represents this enduring sense of identity, aging industrial cities have a unique opportunity to strengthen their images by making waterfront improvements.

The watercourse in an aging industrial city not only provides an opportunity for strengthening identity, but also acts as a datum in the landscape off which interventions must be measured. The watercourse acts as this datum because it offers stability while adjacent uses change to suit the evolving city; indeed, “Despite periodic and sometimes rapid change, a waterfront preserves for its bordering city some inherent and unalterable stability.” Beyond stability, the waterfront acts as a focal point for design in an aging industrial city because it offers a contrast to the urban fabric. At the water’s edge, one can view the expanse of the open waterway, hear the lapping or crashing of waves, or feel the breezes that whip over the water – all sensory experiences that differ from that of driving in the insulated car.

---


However, these sensory experiences are not provided in the design of every urban waterfront; for many aging industrial cities, the waterfront is still evolving to meet the aesthetic desires of the public. Moreover, “Attractive, lively city landscapes do not evolve as a matter of course, but are only created with the restoration of waterfront locations as a stabilizing and identifying factor in the planning processes. This ties in with the establishment of new points of access to the riverbank and facilities allowing communities to experience the element of water.”

Considering the urban watercourse as the datum off which new urban identities must stem implies both a visual and cultural reconnection to the waterway. In order to create this visual and cultural connection and strengthen the urban identity, it is important to consider different strategies for conceptualizing change off this datum.

In order to improve identity along the urban waterfront, changes in the built environment must be mutually beneficial for those who experience the buildings (private users) and the public users, who increasingly want to use the water’s edge for recreation. In order to balance the need for open public access to the water with the private interests that shape the built environment, the watercourse

---

must be conceptualized as extending beyond the literal water’s edge. This implies an understanding of the water’s edge beyond the literal demarcation between land and water:

Land-water relationships are often thought of in terms of opposites, or of the edge between the two. Metaphysically, this edge is razor thin. In terms of city building, the opposite is true. Places like Amsterdam, Sydney, or San Francisco make this quite evident with their complex land-water weave. Even when geography offers limited variation, the broader the zone of overlap between land and water, the more successfully a city will capture the benefits of its water assets.¹⁶

In order to create this “complex land-water weave,” a designer must

connect existing assets to the water. This connection allows private investments to spread deeper into the city by virtue that they “tie in” to the waterfront park system. The Urban Land Institute emphasizes this principle of “land-water weave” when they write, “It is generally easier to attract investment to the water’s very edge, and to construct … a façade along the water. … The allure of the ‘thin line’ … must be balanced by a conception of the waterfront that incorporates perpendiculcals to the water’s edge.”\(^{(17)}\) This “land-water weave” balances private interests with public assets by allowing the waterway to remain a public asset, while improving it to promote adjacent private reinvestment.

Beyond the balance of public and private interests at the waterfront, a balance must exist between the health of the land and the health of the river. It is not enough to improve the built environment at the cost of the ecological health of the waterway. New \(^{(17)}\) Ibid., 33-34.
development within the built environment must attempt to offset the harm committed by initial ignorance of existing watersheds and the effect of effluent on water systems. Another approach to waterfront improvement, which has been applied to the Rhine in its relationship with the German Rhineland, is to consider the river as the “spine” of the region. This corporal metaphor requires that the body be seen as integrated with the spine, focusing on the quality of life for both the region, which offers a competitive market in the global economy, and the river, which must respond to the negative environmental impacts of climate change. In order to strengthen the identity of the city, the unbuilt environment must emulate the health that the social and cultural environment sustains. Investing in the health of the landscape improves the social and cultural health of the city through recreation, which in turn reflects positively for the city’s identity.

Although the historic significance of an aging industrial city’s waterfront endures, present-day social and cultural forces actively reshape the waterfront. The goal of these waterfront transformations should be to improve the image and identity of the host city. The most successful means for this positive transformation consider the

---

urban watercourse as the datum off which new urban identities stem. Through the concepts of “land-water weave” and waterway as “spine,” a designer can attempt to balance private and public interests as well as socio-cultural and environmental health. Finding this balance provides the most successful means of reconnecting the city to its watercourse.
Identity for an aging industrial city is not only held in the enduring symbols of its landscape, but also in its urban fabric, where the identity changes as rapidly as the social flows of its inhabitants. Within the built environment, interventions that attempt to strengthen identity must go beyond mere visual appeal, as, “The function of design is not only to make cities attractive but also to make them more adaptive, more fluid, more capable of accommodating changing demands and unforeseen circumstances.”

Moreover, design that considers identity must “form the total scene so that it is easy for the human observer to identify its parts and to structure the whole.”

The goal of such effective design must be to improve the fluidity of the city while still providing the structure needed for users to form perceptions and identity.

At the urban waterfront, the enduring landscape of the river, the urban fabric of the city, and the architecture of the future built environment intersect. This intersection requires flexibility among the three disciplines (landscape architecture, urban planning, and architecture) in order to negotiate the opposing interests involved and produce the most integrated work:

[New works combining landscape and urbanism] indicate a renewed interest in the instrumentality of design – its enabling function – as opposed to representation and stylization. Here, the term landscape no longer refers to prospects of pastoral innocence but

---


20 Kevin Lynch, Image of the City (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1972), 13.
rather invokes the functioning matrix of connective tissue that organizes not only objects and spaces but also the dynamic processes and events that move through them. This is landscape as active surface, structuring the conditions for new relationships and interactions among the things it supports.\(^{21}\)

This integration offers an essential function that is lacking in many of the aging industrial cities: support for social interaction. For many aging industrial cities, the existing fabric supports the elements of

“work” and “play” but fails to meet the social and cultural needs of effective livable space. These three elements (living, working, and playing) currently exist as separate pieces of suburbanized life: one lives in an area entirely separate from where he works, and when he is between the two places, he perceives the journey as one that progresses through static places. Because the activity of people living, working, and playing within the public realm creates more dynamic social and cultural interactions, “The emphasis [of the restructuring of cities and landscapes today] is on the extensive reworking of the surface of the earth as a smooth, continuous matrix that effectively binds the increasingly disparate elements of our environment together.”

This binding of disparate parts is especially relevant at the waterfront, where “play” functions alone cannot sustain the day-to-day activities that make urban environments vibrant. Wall’s point that design (specifically when landscape, urbanism, and architecture intersect) is “an active accelerant, staging and setting up new conditions for uncertain futures” allows for design that goes beyond meeting today’s needs, providing a context where future development can “plug in” to the dynamic landscape.

---

22 Ibid., 246.
23 Ibid., 233.
The methods used to create dynamic architectural landscapes, must manipulate the field commonly considered the “urban surface.” This field, which “refer[s] to the extensive and inclusive ground-plane of the city; to the “field” that accommodates buildings, roads, utilities, open spaces, neighborhoods, and natural habitats … is dynamic and responsive; like a catalytic emulsion, the surface literally unfolds events in time.”\textsuperscript{24} This surface must be manipulated to create a new context by which the aging industrial city can improve its identity.

Alex Wall, a contemporary urban designer, proposes strategies for “rebuilding, incorporating, connecting, [and] intensifying” the programmatic functions of these new “urban surfaces.” He draws these strategies -- thickening, folding, new materials, nonprogrammed use, impermanence, and movement -- out of his analysis and interpretation of projects that he feels successfully address the hybrid condition of urbanism and the landscape.\textsuperscript{25} These strategies, demonstrated through precedent research can be applied to the urban waterfront.

The dynamic urban surface, created to improve an aging industrial city’s identity, must connect people to the waterfront, improve access to the river’s edge, and allow for greater degrees of social and cultural interaction. The surface accomplishes these goals through surface strategies that treat the landscape as the connective tissue of the city. This connective tissue addresses the unique opportunity of architecture to create places for meaningful social interaction. To quote Jonas Brodin, social geographer, “Space does not direct events, but it does shape possibility.”\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 233.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 245-246.
\textsuperscript{26} Jonas Brodin, “The Structure of Public Space” (paper presented at the 2006 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, April 20–23 2006), 8.
THICKENING

Project: The Lurie Garden in Millennium Park
Location: Chicago, IL
Designer: Gustason Guthrie Nichol

The Lurie Garden, located in Millennium Park, demonstrates Wall’s strategy of “thickening.” The entirety of Millennium Park is built over a subterranean parking structure, which can be considered the lowest public ground plane. The park itself acts as the primary public ground plane, on-grade with the city sidewalk. Connecting the park to adjacent Grant Park, the BP bridge leads pedestrians over S. Columbus Dr. and acts as the highest public ground plane. The Lurie Garden provides circulation, a habitat for birds and butterflies, and an innovative solution to drainage. In an urban area dominated by pavement and impervious surfaces, the Lurie Garden collects storm-runoff within a trough that serves as a primary feature for guests to the park, who can be found resting with their feet in the water. The use of numerous public ground planes and multiple functions contained within features makes the Lurie Garden an example of “thickening.”
05.03 The Lurie Garden demonstrates thickening by having multiple public ground planes and providing multiple functions within each plane.
The Museum of the Earth, an 18,000 square foot facility that focuses on the geologic history of the Earth and the life which has inhabited it, from 534 million years ago through present time, demonstrates the surface strategy of folding. The exterior ground surface, which slopes from the front entrance toward the rear of the building, is echoed within the circulation of the building. The approach prepares a guest for the experience within the museum by walking them past numerous water terraces that imitate the glacial carvings of the region. The sloped ground plane gently levels as it folds into the building. This folding allows the exterior plaza program to spread within the building so successfully that people hold banquets and wedding receptions within the atrium. The circulation folds through the building and exits, where the program within the building (exhibits on evolution and geology) extend beyond the envelope into the Ice Age Garden.
05.06 The Museum of the Earth demonstrates folding because the circulation through the landscape continues seamlessly into the building and reemerges again to on the exterior.
NEW MATERIALS

Project: Flussbad Oberer Letten
Location: Zurich, Switzerland
Designer: Rotzler Krebs Partner GmbH, Winterthur

Oberer Letten, a public bathing area in Zurich, uses a diversity of materials in order to express its unique character to visitors. Rather than choosing from a typical palette of pavement, stone, plantings, and site furniture, this project uses its material palette to express a “ramshackle character.” The gabion benches, made of creek rock encircled in wire mesh, provide an alternative to pre-purchased site furnishings, and encourage a greater range of use -- children are more likely to stand or play on them than typical site furniture. The untreated wood decking, which would normally be thought of as a material for a walkway, acts as a sundeck when placed between the gravel walking surface and the grassy free-play space. Finally, color -- represented by paint, graffiti, and site furniture is used to interject personality into what would be a very neutral palette.
05.09 The “new materials” present in Oberer Letten contribute to the character of the place.
**NONPROGRAMMED USES**

**Project:** Teardrop Park  
**Location:** New York City, NY  
**Designer:** Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates

Teardrop Park, a small park that occupies an otherwise inactive interstitial space between large housing complexes in New York City, combines programmed spaces with nonprogrammed spaces in order to encourage appropriation and shared uses of public spaces. Rather than employing typical manufactured playground equipment, the main programmed space, a children’s playground, uses natural materials to create slides, steps, and a climbing hemisphere. Surrounding this programmed space, are several nonprogrammed spaces. These spaces, although highly designed, allow for multiple uses. A rocky area with small fountains acts as a children’s play area on warm summer afternoons, but creates a serene view in the early and late hours. In addition, a focal retaining wall exploits natural conditions to create an ice sculpture in winter months. These nonprogrammed spaces allow designers to take advantage of spaces that occur between main functions.
Teardrop Park takes advantage of the interstitial condition of the housing complex and divides the area with paths that connect units and provide "pass-throughs." The spaces between those paths then become highly designed -- but not all are programmed.
The Fuzi Pedestrian Zone takes advantage of the surface strategy of “impermanence” by nesting smaller impermanent spaces for local use within the overall urban context. These nested spaces are then transformed during San Candido’s tourist season. The main shopping promenade in the Italian village reacts to the influx of many skiing tourists by draining paddling ponds, removing planters, and subtracting benches. When these amenities are removed, more space is available for needed circulation; however, when skiing season ends, the amenities are returned in order to give local residents greater enjoyment from the square.
The town transforms its urban square based on the number of people who access the space.
The Eastbank Esplanade offers a fresh solution to the problem of pedestrian integration with highway infrastructure. Rather than burying the infrastructure (i.e. Big Dig) or rerouting it to serve aesthetic goals, Portland employed the surface strategy of “movement” to place people in cars, people on foot, people on bikes, and people on boats in an interweaving relationship. At times, a pedestrian experiences the Wilamette River, and at other times, the freeway and primary bridges. The most important aspect of the Eastbank Esplanade is that it allows pedestrians an opportunity to reach downtown (the west bank) from the east bank by tying into the existing bridges and street grid on the eastern bank. This also creates a loop that can be used for exercise and recreation.
The Eastbank Esplanade shows the interweaving “movement” of cars, people and cyclists, and boat traffic that respects infrastructure while enhancing pedestrian experience.
PART III: TOLEDO
Moving forward, probably the most compelling view of American metropolitan cities should remain largely process-oriented rather than adhering to particular images. At best, they can be regarded as somewhat self-organizing systems of spatial events and relationships, where apparent system openness, fungibility, and a status of ‘becoming’ rather than being entirely ‘made’ will likely continue to appeal most to the expectations of hopeful inhabitants.\(^{27}\)

Many Americans perceive aging industrial cities negatively, particularly in the Midwest. The urban core of aging industrial cities such as Toledo is often perceived as dangerous, and despite the many theories as to why (including the presence of broken windows, the lack of surveillance and other people, and the heavy media coverage of criminal activities) no empirical evidence can substantiate why people fear the city and thus what might remedy this fear. Although, this perception has been transformed in the past twenty years by cities such as Chicago, which have attracted investment, visitors, and educated residents, Toledo still battles the suburban fear of the urban core. For Toledoans, racially-charged riots are not decades past, but a recent memory; most Toledo residents can remember the neo-Nazi riot that occurred in the North End, a Toledo neighborhood, in 2005. Despite the rarity of such situations, many allow that event to define Toledo, which is otherwise characterized by such assets as an expansive public waterfront, walkable urban grid, access to public transportation, and historic architecture. This negative perception can be reversed (as is evidenced by Chicago) and so can the destruction of the historic character of this aging industrial city.

The thesis project, which seeks to improve identity through formal and social connections reveals strategies for designing this “inhabitable surface,” and applies them to a project in Toledo, OH. Although the master plan for the Toledo waterfront employs the strategies in order to improve Toledo’s identity, the process is, as Rowe notes, one of ‘becoming.’

---

SELECT IDENTITIES

The Great Black Swamp

One feature identity that sets Toledo apart from other large cities within Ohio is its prior life as part of the “Great Black Swamp.” As a result of glacial melting, a broad swath of present-day Northwest Ohio was “covered by water most of the year, except for very dry summers, or when frozen solid in a cold winter.”

This terrain, which was characterized by excessive mud, thick forests filled with intertwined trees, and waist-high marsh grasses, harbored “swarming clouds of mosquitoes.” The mud was “so awful a struggling horse could sink to its chest,” and the presence of the mosquitoes led settlers to wear thick clothing, despite soaring summer temperatures. Because of the dangerous and unpleasant conditions, early settlers struggled to travel through, build homes upon, and live within the Great Black Swamp. The perseverance and faith of those who settled the treacherous Great Black Swamp is evoked in the use of this identity. In addition, this terrain was the home of many marshland and river species, which the Toledo Mudhens (minor league baseball), Toledo Walleye (minor league hockey), and Toledo Bullfrogs (proposed arena football) capitalize in creating their brand identities.

Although Toledo was once the Great Black Swamp, any visitor

---

29 Ibid., 1.
30 Ibid., 1.
can see that this landscape feature no longer exists. In order to live within the area, settlers needed to drain the swamp. According to Harger, settlers, under the direction of the state, began digging an extensive network of ditches in 1852. These ditches were done using “primitive” methods:

Often the men worked in pairs with two shovels. One man stood in the ditch, scooped up a shovelful of the clinging muck, and tossed it up to the second man. The second man threw the clean shovel down into the ditch, then scraped off the mud
from the first shovel to have it ready for another round.\textsuperscript{31}

According to Mauk, the entire process was expedited by the 1860 discovery of clay beneath the swamp, which was used to create clay tile, which was then laid in the trenches to facilitate the draining of water.\textsuperscript{32} By 1920, the ditch digging was complete, leaving rich, flat farmland in the wake of treacherous marshes; in present-day Toledo, the only traces of the literal Great Black Swamp are “the marshes along the southwestern shore of Lake Erie between Toledo and Port Clinton, land that is now mostly in the domain of state and national wildlife refuges.”\textsuperscript{33} Despite the lack of its physical presence, the Great Black Swamp is evoked as an enduring identity of Toledo.


The Glass City

Toledo has been known as “The Glass City” since the city’s manufacturing heyday, which occurred over a century ago. Arguably, the most important manufactured product from the Toledo industrialist community at this time was glass, and its popularity came as the result of a risky business decision. Edward Drummond Libbey, a Toledo industrialist who had been losing money on his glass factory for five years prior, developed a “working model of a glass factory” for “the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893.” This publicity spurred orders for his mass-produced cut glass, and his business began to succeed:

Libbey’s success was a pivotal event for Toledo as it promoted the advantages of the city to outsiders and led several major businesses to relocate there. The city thus embarked on a new course of growth and development. It was transformed from a small river and lake port village into a modern twentieth century urban center with a manufacturing base. The transformation began with the success of The Libbey Glass Company and continued at a rapid and sustained pace until the Great Depression began in 1929. It was the most important and productive era in Toledo’s history. This era, from the mid-1890s until 1929, gave the city its own identity and its distinctive character.

Toledo’s history of glass manufacturing does not end with the tale of one industrialist; Libbey partnered with Michael J. Owens and together they designed “the first light-bulb-making machine” and “machines to blow bottles and fruit jars.” Edward Ford also moved to Toledo,

---


where he “built an entirely mechanized glass factory.” The three eventually merged into what is now Owens Corning, a specialist in fiberglass insulation and other construction products, which employs many Toledoans in manufacturing and corporate jobs.

The identity of Toledo as the Glass City is somewhat transformed by the Toledo Museum of Art, TMA, which has an extensive collection of glass art pieces. Rather than focusing on the utilitarian origins of glass in Toledo, TMA emphasizes the future of glass as an artistic expression for enrichment of the community. The Toledo Glass Pavilion, designed by SANAA, houses a portion of TMA’s glass collection and offers glass blowing workshops and demonstrations. TMA is instrumental in evoking the beauty of Toledo as the Glass City.

37 Ibid., 29.
**Toledo ♥ JEEP**

*It's more than four-wheelers

*We're fighting to keep.

*It's the people who make them.

*Why Toledo loves Jeep.*

Another aspect of Toledo’s identity involves its role in automotive manufacturing. Once considered the “Auto Parts Capital of the World” – the companies Champion Spark Plug, Spicer, Mather, Unitcast, Dana, AP Parts, Electric Auto Lite, Doehler, Standard Oil, and Pure Oil were all located there – Toledo is also home to a facility that manufactures Jeeps. Although numerous manufacturing facilities employ Toledo’s working class, Jeep is probably the most widely known because of its community presence and the heavy publicity that surrounded the construction of and economic subsidies given for its new manufacturing facility, which opened in 2006.

**Although Jeep’s most expansive years were during the 1940s, when the**


now-demolished plant manufactured World War II military vehicles, the production of the Jeep Liberty now keeps Toledoans employed. For Toledo, the Jeep identity is about the strength of the city’s working class. For many, Jeep represents family tradition, manufacturing tradition, and a sense of patriotism.
This map shows the highways that traverse through Toledo and its surrounding suburbs. The highways are important because they are the primary way people connect to and move through and around the city. My site is located in downtown Toledo, in a neighborhood known as “Central City,” readily accessible by I-75 and I-280. Also of primary importance to my specific site is the Maumee River, which flows from southwest of Toledo into Lake Erie.
The map shows, in full color, the Central City neighborhood, which shares a common street grid. The specific site of the project is circled in red.
08.03 Zooming into the downtown area, we see the Central City in greater detail.

Along the half-mile stretch of Toledo’s waterfront (pink), nearly half the ground area (49%, shaded green) is dedicated to public parks and riverfront promenade. But no one really uses it. On a temperate Sunday in the fall, the park is empty. Henry Shafroe, describing the problem, wrote, “For a public space to be REAL it has to be USED.”

The Toledo waterfront Master Plan envisions a new life for downtown Toledo and the Central City neighborhood. The specific site (labeled in yellow) serves as a key intersection between the movement parallel to the waterfront and the movement of urban dwellers to the site.
[1] Built Context, Fort Industry Square
[2] asphalt Parking Lot, private
[5] Sidewalk, concrete
[8] Paved Pathway, cement pavers
[9] Rock wall, large white aggregate

08.04 Important Physical Features
The topography of my site has important implications for drainage. Although the existing parking lot slopes very gently from west to east, the entirety of the Central City mimics this trend, which means that runoff from a large portion of downtown eventually flows through my site and the adjacent waterfront park into the Maumee River, where it is whisked out to Lake Erie. Although there is no issue involving the capacity of the river and its ability to receive stormwater, there are numerous environmental problems that have developed as a result of the old notion that “dilution” is the solution to “pollution,” and this project has an opportunity to develop a more environmentally sound response to stormwater management.

This site also has some dangers that arise from the steep embankment and jagged rocks that exist at the water’s edge. Notably, this site is the only portion of the existing promenade that has no railing at the waterfront.

The northeastern edge of my site, the existing Murphy’s jazz club, has a more significant slope that potentially creates some accessibility issues.
This site is currently lacking in any sort of rich experience. The current attitude toward this parking lot is one of utility. People predictably enter from a one way street, park, pay, return, and leave.

This parking lot also has a subtle aspect of exclusivity. Because it is accessed by a one way street and is hidden from vehicular view by the adjacent building, one must presumably know it's there. In addition, even if one can locate it geographically (as I could upon my last site visit), one must understand the pattern of the one way streets in order to access it. When I first attempted to access it, I drove the incorrect way down two one-way streets (Owen's Corning Way and Water St.), a frightening mistake, but one easily made when streets have no cars on them to show the correct traffic pattern. Also, the parking lot appears exclusive because it has a 1:1 relationship with the adjacent building, leading a vehicular passenger to associate parking in those spaces with going to that building, rather than visiting the public waterfront.

Part of my program may include an underground parking structure, making wayfinding and directional signage important. In addition, Water St. may disappear entirely.

Even if I know the parking lot is there, I may still have trouble navigating to it, making landmark recognition and wayfinding important aspects of this project.

The only traffic-abiding approach is to take Jefferson and turn right on Water St.

I cannot turn right on Water St., so I must drive by the parking lot and around the building.
08.07 Context of the Toledo Waterfront
08.08 Climatic Condition: Flooding: This FEMA issued Flood Insurance Rate Map shows the extent of my site that may be affected by flooding. Due to the excessive interventions along the Maumee River throughout downtown Toledo, including numerous seawalls and sloped ramparts, floods are not a severe issue. In addition, this segment of the river is actually an estuary that rises and falls with the level of Lake Erie. The majority of flooding occurs upstream in communities like Maumee, Perrysburg, and Grand Rapids, where naturally-occurring floodplains are recharged each spring with heavy precipitation.
08.09 "The scene of chief interest as we slowly passed up the stream, consisted of the white tents of the Indians camped on the west bank, from the house of Major Stickney... to the mouth of Swan Creek.... They were actively engaged in racing and other sports peculiar to indians, but upon discovering the little vessel, they gave one wild (to the passengers unearthly) yell and ran down the bank to get as near as possible to the craft.... The vessel made slow progress up the river, with nothing to be seen but the primeval forest which lined its banks...." - Dresden Howard, 1821

08.10 Swan Creek and the harbor of Toledo, at this time still called "Port Lawrence."

08.11 A drawing of Toledo that shows the "Middle Grounds" (present day Owen's Corning), an area of Toledo that was made by early settlers who attempted to fill the swamp.

08.12 The "primeval forest" has been converted into lumber: and a significant amount of it. This photo is taken slightly southwest of my site.

08.13 What is now the parking lot on my site was one the "Old Red Warehouse," (far right in image) which served as a grain elevator from 1840-1886, when it was demolished. The building just beyond is the Fort Industry Block, which exists today on my site. The photo also shows Toledo's first sewer pipe, dating from 1849.
08.14 (right) This image is of Fort Industry Square, the existing building(s) on my site. According to Speck, “The block had five dealers in wines and liquors, leather dealers, a tea and tobacco merchant, sewing machine dealers, two cigar factories, and a pet shop.” Speck continues, commenting on the current condition of the buildings, saying:

Currently known as Fort Industry Block, the buildings were remodeled with no apparent attempt at restoration; holes were cut through the brick walls to achieve a ‘mall’ effect, and they have a rather impersonal appearance due to the lack of signs and awnings.⁴⁰

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aging Industrial Cities: Toledo


Identity


**Urbanism**


**Waterfronts**

