

LA 402 URBAN DESIGN STUDIO
Fall 2008, 6 credits
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MWF 1:00-5:20, COD 262

Re-occupying the Skywalks of Sioux City's Piano Nobile

This urban design studio rethinks the Midwestern city's (often forsaken) downtown skywalks as a means to reinvigorate, densify, and spectacularize the downtown.



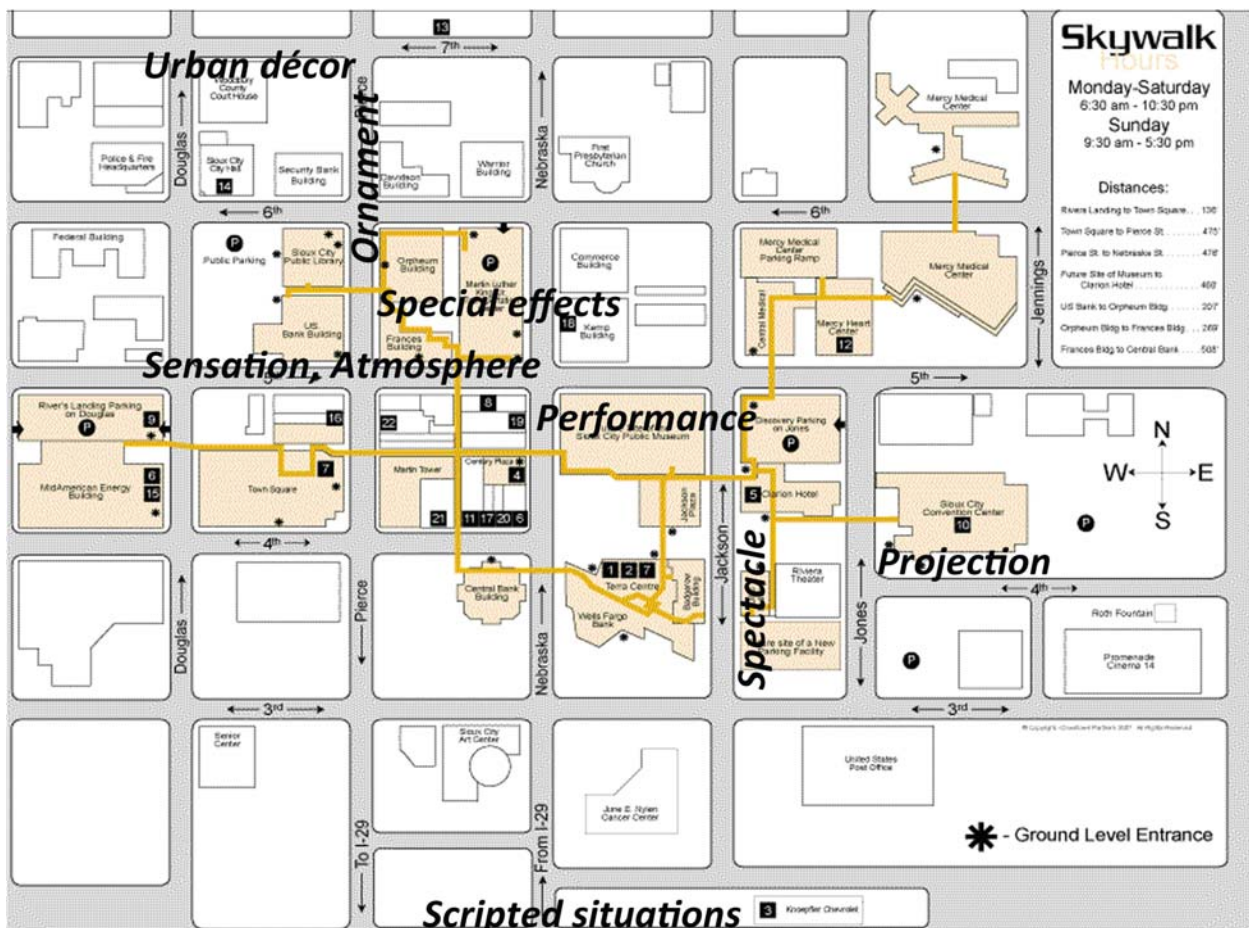
General studio objectives

- Examine historical and contemporary developments of downtowns.
- Introduce the varying forces and constituents that are shaping the contemporary city.
- Introduce highly sensorial urban design and art projects that describe and engage the global city in new ways.
- Develop analytical and representation tools for urban design.

Conceptual Grounding of project

The current Beijing Olympics is a display of many of the ingredients that constitute an emerging contemporary city—high-image architecture, special effects, participation in the “sustainable consciousness,” and historicized neighborhoods. It presents a carefully crafted image and operates as a media-selling machine. Buildings are attention-seeker and landscape a sign of environmental consciousness and leisure culture. This reality may seem distant to mid-America, yet it is a viable and competitive formula in today’s global market economy. Des Moines has been navigating this territory for over a decade. The studio is therefore based on the following assumptions:

- In an **experience economy** of **high-image culture** cities compete for identity and spectacularity.
- **Visual consumption** drives all forms of urban experience.
- Contemporary cities operate according to a **marketing-driven logic**.
- Urban design is to a large extent akin to **product design**.



Background

The project intervenes at the heart of the Midwestern central business district and proposes to reoccupy a prominent yet defunct “historical” vestige of the not-too-distant past— the Skywalks. They still frame street views and connect the second floor of private and public, commercial and office buildings into an uninterrupted linear network but have become “invisible” and underused. You may be familiar with the skywalks of Des Moines and the renowned **Minneapolis Skyway System**, one of the largest continuous (and still vital) system in the world that is compared to the underground of Canadian cold weather cities of Toronto and Montreal. Midwestern cities built the skywalks to compete with car-oriented commercial strips and climate controlled suburban malls. During the 1990s, as retail at street level continued to decrease and streets drained of pedestrians, Skywalks were subject to a smearing campaign. They were blamed for aggravating the decline of downtown’s commerce and vitality. New projects labored to bring life back to the street level; some even dismantled skyways, and yet upper building levels remained empty with little activity and use.

Project site

Sioux City’s Skywalks were built in the 1980s after a plan for an enclosed 4th St mall was stalled. It was built in several stages and now connects 15 blocks of the central business district, including a hospital, convention center, museum, library, theater, and hotel. Three major parking ramps feed the system. In the past major department stores anchored the walks and opened to customers at both street and first levels; food kiosks and other retail venues were integral parts of the attraction. Today, the Skyway is mostly empty of commercial activity and people, only a few offices open to it. Security men, who patrol the skywalks during opening hours between 6:00 am and 11:00 pm, seven days a week, were the only users on a Thursday morning visit. During lunch hour some people use it for walking exercise, and several times a year it hosts prescribed public events. The skywalks operate under the same rights-of-way as sidewalks and are governed by a Skywalk Board of Trustees.

(See Sioux City History 1980-2002/ Marcia Poole, 2003; Sioux City, A Pictorial History/ Scott Sorensen et al, 1982)

Project synopsis

The task of this studio is to envision ways to reoccupy the skywalks, to create enticing and inviting environments of intense spectacles and scripted situations. The studio also engages exterior spaces and parking garages related to this interior armature. The ambition of the project is to produce new programs, spaces, and effects that appeal directly to the body as well as make economic sense. **Sioux Skywalk City** is construed here as an activity and image-making infrastructure able to operate as advertising strategies and to participate in the global streamlining of urban experience and image consumption.

Newly designed décor, access, program, connectivity, way finding, (passive) surveillance, and codes will re-imagine the skywalks as public hallways, art galleries, exercise tracks, activity nodes, urban display boxes, street theaters, billboards, projection screens, hanging gardens, street bridges, framed urban views, and more. The newly occupied second floor hallways will cater to all ages and social groups; street bridge displays will become an extension of the decorated facades of the traditional city; parking ramps will be reconceived as hanging gardens. New connections between buildings and floors and outside and inside will be explored; extensions of the skywalks into exterior walks and terraces will be reconsidered; attention will be given to seasons within the year-round active spaces.

Urban Particularities

Rethinking the skywalks as urban product design of high-imageability requires tapping into some of the city's "particularities." Among these are two of Sioux City idiosyncratic architectural decor, eclecticism, and eccentricity, signs to the freedom to explore and display oddities and viable ingredients of individuality and creativity.

Terra Cotta City

In its heyday, Sioux City was blessed with extravagant architectural exteriors and interiors, of which Terra Cotta decor was prominent. The city managed to save and store some of the Terra Cotta from razed buildings. The elaborate Terra cotta tiles, reliefs, and sculptures on the facades and the murals, chandeliers, and decorative architectural interiors of the traditional city (of which only a fraction remained) will be studied, promoted, recovered, and supplemented with contemporary urban décor of electronic technology, lighting, and interactive special atmospheric effects across the walkways.

Curiosity City

Sioux City is quirky, filled with displays of oddities and peculiarities, some planned, others accidental. Some of these are listed below:

Art and sculpture—Trinity Heights: Giant Madonna and Christ; Life-size wooden sculpture of the Last Supper

Urban Monuments—Court House -hidden dome, prison courtyard, Prairie Style Sky room & Terrace; City Hall – Romanesque-Moderne façade; Orpheum Theater - entry hall, VIP room & Office façade

Urban peculiarities – Skewed grid; hidden Floyd River; Free standing bridge footings; bridges turned parking lots

Architectural eclecticism – Moorish shrine, square coliseum, medieval towers

(See a more extensive list assembled by Abbie Gaffey)



Project Sequence

I. Three Introductory Exercises (weeks 1-2) 15%

The first two studies of this initial segment are intended, on the one hand, to free your imagination from constraining and problematic associations of skywalks and, on the other hand, to ground you in the reality that drives today's cities—consumption. The third component introduces you to the increasing role contemporary of art and design works in shaping competitive cities. It also explores art and design works done in analogical linear spaces ranging from airport concourse, to underground cities, to elevated rail systems. These studies set the foundation for the project.

II. Site Visit and modeling (weeks 3-5) 20%

Following the first site visit and data and resource collection we develop analytic tools and representations able to describe the uniquely linear spaces, serial experiences, and repetitive surfaces of the skywalks and their adjacent structures and spaces. A series of large-scale drawings and models will be developed. (need to reserve videocam equipment)

III. Performing the Skywalks (weeks 6-8) 20%

Design ideas for occupying and “performing” the skywalks are developed. The focus here is on program, sensorial environments, and product/image design.

IV. Performing the Skywalks II (weeks 9-12) 20%

Following a second site visit this phase continues design development with increasing attention to details and materiality.

V. Producing the exhibition (13-15) 25%

The last four weeks are devoted to intense work toward a Skywalk public exhibition, pending outside resources.

STUDIO FORMAT

Each class commences with a general assembly for lectures, discussion over readings, reports of new findings, and announcements. During desk crits you are responsible to meet and discuss your progress with the instructor. There will be four reviews and occasional pin-ups. The class web site will be used for weekly messages and resources.

Class fee: You will be charged \$ _____ to cover three site visits, including a total of four hotel nights and transportation

MEDIA

You are expected to be innovative and compellingly experimental. This is your opportunity to explore new digital techniques, including 3-D, video editing, and animation programs. Although most work will be done on computer screen, Medium-size prints of your work (11/17 and larger) will be required for desk crits and pin-ups during the design process. Poster size prints must accompany your digital presentations during main reviews. The digital prints will be a costly item of this studio.

In addition to various drawings, some of the media involved are:
Edited video projections; Large-scale models; Wall-size banners and transparencies for a public exhibition (this will be done if funding support is provided)

READINGS

There is no textbook for this studio. A series of essays and class lectures will form the knowledge base for your work. Required readings will be available in a folder in class. The following authors and concepts will be read and discussed:

Author/Designer	Key words/concepts
Italo calvino	fantastic cities
Rem Koolhaas et al	junk space, shopping environments
Bernard Tschumi	events, program
Cedric Price	performativity, indeterminacy, "Fun Palace"
Ian Borden	urban performance, skateboarding
Petra Blaisse	inside/outside decor
Gordon Cullen	climate, outdoor publicity
Robert Venturi	billboardscape, stripscape
The Situationists	city of atmosphere, situations
Mark Wigley	special effects, atmosphere, urban flux
Bret Steele	spectacular-ization
Michael Speaks	experience economy, life style, Identity branding

BOOKS ON RESERVE

Below is a reference list of books in the field of Urbanism placed on reserve for this course. Also see reserve list for LA 478F, The Contemporary City.

Invisible Cities/ Italo calvino, 1972

Contemporary urbanism:

Everyday Urbanism / John Chase et al, eds., 1999

Transurbanism/ Arjen Mulder et al, 2002

Mutation/ Rem Koolhaas et al, 2000

S,M,L,XL / Rem Koolhaas & Bruce Mau, 1995

Points + Lines: Diagrams and projects for the City/ Allan Stan, 1999

The Urban Text/ Mario Gandelsonas, 1991

Urban Revisions / Russel Ferguson and Elizabeth Smith, eds., 1994

SuperDutch: New Architecture in the Netherlands/Bart Lootsma, 2000

West 8/ Luca Molinari, ed. 2000

The Unknown City/ Ian Borden et al, 2002

EcoUrbanism: Sustainable Human Settlements: 60 Case Studies / Miguel Ruano, 1993

NOX: Machining Architecture / Lars Spuybroek, 2004

Skycar City: A Preemptive History/ MVRDV

Landscape urbanism:

Landscape Urbanism/ Mosen Mostafari, ed., 2003

Landscape Urbanism, A Reader/ Charles Waldheim, 2006

Sioux City:

Sioux City, A Pictorial History/ Scott Sorensen et al, 1982

Sioux City History 1980-2001/ Marcia Poole, 2003
Sioux City, An Architectural View, 1983
Nathan Kalaher, March Thesis, 2006 (on website)

Contemporary landscape architecture:

The Artificial Landscape / Hans Ibelings, 2000
Between Landscape Architecture and Land Art/ Udo Weilacher, 1996
Radical Landscape: reinventing Outdoor Space / Jane Amidon, 2001
Changes in Scenery / Thies Schroder, 2001
Contemporary American Landscape Architecture/ Gavin Keeney, 2000
Groundswell: Constructing the Contemporary Landscape / Peter Reed, 2005

Contemporary gardens:

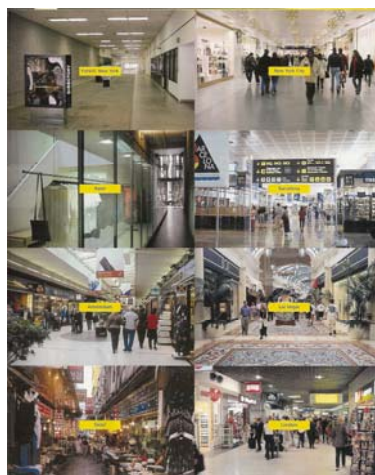
Reinventing the Garden / Louisa Jones, 2003
The New Tech Garden / Paul Cooper, 2002
The Vanguard Landscapes and Gardens of Martha Schwartz / Tim Richardson, 2004

Public Art-Architecture:

Take your time/Olafur Eliasson, 2007
Architecture: Art / Philip Judidio, 2005.

Resources/Websites:

Sioux City history: www.siouxcityhistory.org
Sioux City comprehensive plan: <http://www.sioux-city.org/custom/plncompplan/>
American fact finder:
http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFFacts?_event=Search&geo_id=&geoContext=&street=&county=sioux+city&cityTown=sioux+city&state=04000US19&zip=&lang=en&sse=on&pctxt=fph&pgsl=010
The Pearl Street Research Center: http://www.siouxcitymuseum.org/pearl_street.asp
Skywalks board of trustees: <http://sioux-city.org/custom/boards/view.asp?ID=22>



GRADING AND POLICIES

Final grade is based on attendance, class participation, on-going design process, multiple iterations, and completeness of all assignments. Notify the instructor of any absence or difficulty in completing assignments. Unexcused absence or incomplete work will result in a lower grade (half a grade after two unexcused absences and a whole grade at the fourth absence).

Notes of your progress and production at each desk crit and pin up will be taken and count for the overall grade of each phase. The five phases will count for 15%, 20%, 20%, 20%, and 25% respectively. Progress grade will be given at least twice during the semester and following the final presentation.

You are expected to use a sketchbook of your choice throughout the semester and fill it with ideas, lecture notes, and sketches. This is an upper level studio; expectations for in-depth, independent research and high quality production are high.

The following is the GRADE INTERPRETATION for letter grades (and their numerical equivalents):

A=excellent work; exemplary; greatly exceeds satisfactory standards. Student is a self-starter and routinely takes initiative, does outside research, develops work through multiple and complex iterations, generates thoughtful and innovative solutions, develops works through multiple and complex iterations, and carries work to a high level of finish – going well beyond assigned elements.

B= very good; exceeds satisfactory standards. Student shows consistent progress in studio, does some outside research, develops work through multiple iterations, generates good workable solutions, and always carries work to full completion, going beyond requirements and assigned elements.

C=acceptable work; meets satisfactory standards. Student shows inconsistent progress and occasional initiative, does little outside research, does some iterations, completes all assigned work, but with little evidence of taking initiative or going beyond minimum assignments.

D=marginal work; somewhat below satisfactory standards. Student does not complete all work, shows little initiative, does not do outside research, does minimal iterations, and lacks consistency in meeting minimum requirements and including assigned elements.

F=unacceptable work; does not meet satisfactory standards. Serious deficiency in meeting satisfactory standards. Student shows no initiative, does not do outside research, does not develop evidence of iteration, generates inappropriate solutions, shows little or no care in finished work, and is missing assigned elements.

Other qualitative factors of attitude and improvement will be considered.

Tentative Schedule

This is a rough structure for the semester. A detailed schedule will be given prior to each phase.

week	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
1 8/25	Introduction phase I	Exe 1 due	Exe 2 due
2 9/1	LABOR DAY HOLIDAY	Exe 3 due	Phase II Sioux City site visit Fri-Sat
3 9/8	No class		
4 9/15			
5 9/22			Review
6 9/29	Phase III		
7 10/6			
8 10/13		Midterm Review	Sioux City site visit II
9 10/20	Phase IV		
10 10/27			
11 11/3			Review
12 11/10	Phase V		
13 11/17			
14 11/24	THANKSGIVING	THANKSGIVING	THANKSGIVING
15 12/1			
16 12/8			EXHIBITION FINAL REVIEW