

Georgia Tech, Summer 2012
Arch 4335/8843 Social Practice of Architecture
MTWR 10:00—12:00, Rm 107 Architecture
Instructor: Sonit Bafna <sonit.bafna@arch.gatech.edu > *5-2914

Description and objectives

This course introduces students to the social principles underlying the organization of our built environment. We'll see how buildings help organize society and, how in doing so, take the forms they do. Along the way we'll address some fundamental questions about buildings: we will look at how the first buildings emerged and what shapes they took, and, along the way, consider why buildings emerged within human settlements at all. We will ask why rectangularity dominates building shapes; we will reassess the commonly held belief that traditional environments are always environmentally sustainable, and, we will see how the shapes of buildings ultimately respond more strongly to social demands than to environmental or physical ones, and that the social dimension of buildings is strongly mediated by cognitive factors.

Students should thus expect to come away with an understanding of basic social forces that shape our built-environment, particularly at the scale of buildings. In addition, this course will also introduce students to current research on building morphology and spatial analysis.

Organization

In the first part, we will deal with a set of empirical studies of buildings or building traditions on how our built environment structures the social world. These include work on the origins of buildings and settlements from archaeologists Kent Flannery and Baird; studies of comparative complexity of domestic buildings and societies from Susan Kent; attempts by ethnographers such as Mary Douglas, Henry Glassie, S. J. Tambiah, and Pierre Bourdieu to show that built form relates to cultural rather than the physical environment.

In the second part, we will focus on architectural contribution to the understanding of the relationship between buildings and societies. We will look at the emergence of the man-environment paradigm in the field of behavioral psychology and cultural anthropology, consider challenges to it offered by mathematical work on architectural form by Lionel March, Philip Steadman and their colleagues, and then explore a theory of the social logic of space developed by Bill Hillier, John Peponis, and their colleagues.

Requirements

Student performance will be assessed on a term paper (graduate section) or a take-home essay exam (undergraduate section). It is possible for interested undergraduates to opt for a term-paper instead of the exam, but only after consulting with the instructor. Both the term paper and the exam questions will test students' understanding of the material presented; in addition, the term paper should show ability to synthesize the material into broader and practical design oriented insights. This will account for 80% of the grade. The rest of the grade (20%) will depend upon class participation.

There are no prescribed text-books; required readings will be made available in an electronic format to the students, or placed on temporary reserve in the library.

Main Readings

Ballantyne, Andrew. 2002. *Architecture: A very short introduction*.
Douglas, Mary. 1973. *Rules and Meanings: An Anthropology of Everyday Meanings*
Fraser, Douglas. 1968. *Village Planning in the Primitive World*.
Girouard, M. 1978. *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History*.
Glassie, Henry. 1975. *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia*.
Hillier, Bill, & Julienne Hanson. 1984. *The Social Logic of Space*.
Kent, Susan. 1990. *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space*.
Steadman, Philip. 2008. *The Evolution of Designs*.
Steadman, Philip. 1982. *Architectural Morphology*.
Ucko, Peter J., Ruth Tringham, and G. W. Dimbley. 1972. *Man, Settlement, and Urbanism*.