

GF/ID 335: Sociocultural Aspects of Design

Inst.: Richard Bordner  
Off. Hrs: MWF 10-11, TR 9:30-12, or by app't. (F122)  
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Texts: Kent, Susan (ed.) 1993 (1990). Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space. NW: Cambridge Univ. Press.  
Rensel, Jan & Margaret Rodman (eds.) 1997. Home in the Islands. Honolulu: UH Press.  
Too, Lillian 1994. Practical Applications of Feng Shui. NY: Oriental Pub.

Course Description: The purpose of this course is to provide students with a background in cross-cultural aspects of both exterior and interior design. The main emphasis will be on the use of space as a form of ritual communication within a cultural context, often without conscious awareness of the inhabitants. Areas of discussion will be: patterns of residential layout; concepts of the home in different societies; geomantic/feng shui logic in exterior and interior layout in different cultures (specifically Hawai'i, Japan and China); and cultural aspects to interior design both in layout and furnishings. The major areas of regional emphasis from which examples will be taken from are the Americas (pre-contact), East Asia and the Pacific.

Course Objectives:

- 1) To increase awareness of how pervasive cultural aspects of design are in most societies, including the United States;
- 2) To sensitize people to the need to accommodate to cultural logic in design decisions;
- 3) To develop a more comprehensive understanding of some geomantic systems and feng-shui principles and their application in design decisions;
- 4) To enhance the ability to "read" the use of symbols and icon in space and the cultural meaning of objects in home and office settings.

Grading:

- 1) Reaction Papers: There will be a series of 3 reaction papers required in response to issues raised in the readings and class discussions. Each paper will be from 4-6 pages and will count for 15% of the course grade (totaling 60% of the course grade).
- 2) Term Project: The term project will consist of either a real-world or abstract design problem in which a number of cultural factors can be applied. The paper will discuss both the cultural factors in question and the appropriate solutions in a realistic design setting. The submittal will be a final paper of 6-12 pages in length and a short in-class presentation (10 minutes). The paper will count for 30% of the course grade.
- 3) Attendance/Participation: Attendance is mandatory (university policy). Your participation is critical to the entire group getting any utility out of this class. Summary discussions are handled in class lectures—the books are readings rather than textbooks, so you must read in advance and participate in discussions. Attendance and participation will count for 10% of the course grade.

## Jan. 11: Introduction

Ass: Read Kent ch. 1-2, 4

13: Perception and reality in the behavioral sciences

Ass: Read Rensel prologue-ch. 1

15: Perception and reality in contemporary theory

Ass: Read Rensel ch. 5

18: HOLIDAY

20: Early views of material culture

22: Concepts from cultural and landscape geography

25: Concepts from anthropology and communications: proxemics

Ass: Read Kent ch. 3, 7, 9, Rensel ch. 10

27: Development of semiotic analysis—communication with objects

Ass: Read Kent ch. 5-6, 8, 10

29: Semiotics in the home

## Feb. 1: Semiotic analysis

3: The \$300 word: Architectonic analysis

5: Architectonics and ritual space

8: Marxist analysis

10: Post-modern and post-post-modern trends

12: Cultural landscapes 1885-1999

15: HOLIDAY

17: American cultural landscapes

19: Artificial cultural landscapes—Tourism, Disney and Las Vegas

22: Spatial concepts in Asian societies—Chinese urban planning and feng shui

Ass: Read Too ch. 1-4, 9

24: Feng shui implications in Chinese planning

26: Spatial concepts in Asian societies—Japanese vernacular planning

Ass: Read Rensel ch. 2, 4, 6-8

## March 1: Spatial concepts in Oceanic societies—New Caledonia

3: Community planning and geomancy in Oceania

Ass: Read Waialeale, Haleole xeroxes

5: Community planning and geomancy in pre-contact Hawai'i

8: Community planning issues—values in space

10: Community planning issues—values in space

12: Community planning issues—values in space

15: Moving to real old interiors—application of spatial concepts to interior space, archaeology

17: Interior space from a proxemic perspective

19: Interior space from a symbolic/iconographic perspective

22-26: Spring Recess

Ass: Read Too ch. 5-8

29: Cultural logic in interior space

31: Religion and space

## April 2: HOLIDAY

5: Ritual and control in the interior

7: Consumerism in communication

9: Material culture and consumption

12: Furniture as icon—the lounge as throne

14: The dinner table as ritual stage

16: Practical application of theory—feng shui and clients

19: Practical application of theory—dangerous colors

21: Reports

23: Reports

26: Group work—case studies

28: Group work—case studies

30: The future of cultural landscape studies

May : Project paper due