Architectural Aesthetics and Building Composition

Literally any other discipline concerns itself with aesthetic considerations to the same extent as architecture aside from the visual arts and literature. Indeed, aesthetic issues form an important core of any environmental design process, for many of the most fundamental planning decisions involve making choices about form and space and thus require aesthetic judgements. Likewise, the perceiver’s experience of form for its impact on judging buildings cannot be declared secondary to the pragmatic facets of architecture. Therefore, aesthetics should take a central place in the education of future architects, designers and planners.

This seminar will give an introduction to the field of aesthetics in general and specifically to architectural aesthetics. It will explore the background of prominent theories in architecture, in art, in design, in philosophy and in psychology and show their mutual influences and how they flow into a broader understanding of a field that can be called architectural aesthetics.

Yet equally important in this class is the application of aesthetics to the actual design process. Various theories and methods of architectural composition in the history of architecture and in contemporary design will be investigated regarding their relevance to today's challenges in architecture and urban design.

Selected topics will include:

- What is Aesthetics? What is Architectural Aesthetics?
- Theories in Architecture: Instrumental, Formalist & Theories of Communication
- Aesthetic Theories in the Philosophy of Art / Architecture vs. Art
- Aesthetic Theories in Psychology: Perception and Cognition
- Architectural Treatises and Theories pertaining to Aesthetics
- Space Perception and Spatial Choreography
- Tectonics and the Composition of Facades
- Eye Movement Mapping of Spaces and Facades
- Scale
- Order and Proportion Systems

Each class will start with a lecture by the instructor. Students will work on a small research project on their own choice and present this in written and oral form to the class.

In addition, there will be short exercises in class that will test the application of some of the discussed principles in design practice. The course aims thus at building bridges between the theoretical and the practical.

Prof. Ralf Weber
3 Credits
Tuesday: Lectures
Thursday: student presentations & individual consultations

Ralf Weber
(PhD UC Berkeley) is a Visiting Professor from Dresden University in Germany
Biographical Sketch

Ralf Weber is a Visiting Professor from Germany, where he is a Professor of Architecture and Dean of Academic Affairs at the Faculty of Architecture, Dresden University of Technology.

He received his Diploma in Architecture at the University of Dresden. Thereafter, he settled in Stuttgart where he practiced architecture in the office of Frei Otto / Rolf Gutbrodt and taught at Stuttgart University before moving to Berkeley, California, where he received a PhD in Design Methodology, Environmental Psychology and Aesthetics. He taught for several years at UC Berkeley before he returned to Dresden after the reunification of Germany, when he was appointed Chair for Spatial Design in Architecture. He has held visiting professorships in Ankara, Kent State, Florence and Potsdam.

In his teaching and research he attempts to build bridges between the disciplines of architecture and design on the one hand and the theories of aesthetics and visual perception on the other. He teaches Design Foundations and Architectural Design studios, as well as lecture courses and seminars.

Since he does not believe in a schism between theory and practice, he enjoys teaching hands-on architectural design as well as working on research projects in architectural theory and aesthetics. He is the internationally published author of the books: On the Aesthetics of Architecture; Aesthetics and Architectural Composition; and Thema Material as well as numerous articles bridging the fields of architecture, aesthetics and psychology.