

Wednesday October 1, 2025, 10:15 A.M. to 1:00 P.M.
Room 7.8, 1th floor, Architectural Department (DA)
via Saragozza 8 – Bologna

Prof. Dr. **Jörg H. Gleiter** (TU Berlin, Chair of Architectural Theory)

As part of the Aesthetics for the City and Landscape courses del prof. Andrea Borsari

Why beauty? City, Rituals and Empty Signs

In discussions about the urban context and everyday life, beauty is a contested concept. Whenever one tries to pin it down, beauty evades definition. And yet we cannot do without it. Immanuel Kant was probably the first to avoid defining the undefinable but nevertheless named four characteristics of beauty: beauty is that which cannot be reduced to a concept (*begrifflos*), it is not connected to any interest (*interesselos*), and it is universal (*allgemein*) and necessary (*notwendig*). For Kant, beauty was a matter of individual contemplation. Contemplation means – without words and interest – the immersion of the individual observer in a beautiful work of art, for example a beautiful painting or a church facade or an urban square. After Kant, later generations dissolved the individual contemplation and generalized it. Behind the experience of contemplation now emerged the experience of ritualization, although, no doubt, it was somehow already inherent in Kant's conception of the universal and necessary nature of beauty. And today we would term Kant's conceptlessness as empty sign or simulacrum. The empty sign and simulacrum are the prerequisite of ritual. Art and beauty are ritual. In the seminar, we will discuss the nexus of beauty and ritualization and the empty sign or simulacrum as a prerequisite for ritual. For this purpose it will be necessary to take a look not only at Kant's *Critique of aesthetic judgement*, but also at the rituals in antiquity and our own time, modern architecture and Japan and her gardens. One might say: If only Kant had known more about Japan!

Preparatory Literature

Massimo Cacciari, *Architecture and Nihilism: On the Philosophy of Modern Architecture*, New Haven et al.: Yale UP 1993.
de Coulanges, Fustel, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws and Institutions of Greece and Rome*, Lee & Shepard 1877, pp. 15-92, <https://archive.org/details/cu31924100532054/page/n5/mode/2up?view=theater>.
Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. by J.H. Bernard, London: McMillan and Co. 1914, p 45-100.
Mertins, Detlef, "Mies' Skyscraper 'Project': Towards the Redemption of Technical Structure", in Id., *The Presence of Mies*, Princeton: Princeton UP 1994, p. 66.
Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Birth of Tragedy*, <http://www.edarcipelago.com/classici/nietzsche/Nietzsche%20Friedrich%20-%20Birth%20of%20Tragedy%20-%26%20Other%20Writings%20-%28Cambridge%20-%201999%29.pdf>, pp. 3-33.



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