

Perception-Based Research

Uta Graff

Trained perception and architectural design are inseparably intertwined. The future experience of a building is already anticipated in its design. Architectural design and creation anticipate the experience of architectural spaces to the extent that it is already conceived in the design process. The imagination of future buildings additionally includes the dimension of the spatial experience. It is based on perception, memory and sensory experience – the already familiar is transformed into something new, and starting from well-known spaces, future ones are developed as resembling them, as comparable in a certain way or as different from existing references. The concreteness of architecture requires a distinct imagination. In order to transmit the knowledge embedded in the design, suitable and adequate forms of representation are required.

The more attentively one feeds one's own imagination, the more precise a design and its representations can be. Precise in this case does not mean refining with pristine distinction, but signifies thought and being made with care. Representation, presentation technique, and architectural conception are reciprocally interlinked. As architecture itself, as well as its manifold ways of presentation are all forms of aesthetic expression, they ought to meet the atmospheric, sensory, attentive or substantial qualities of one another.

Hence, the design is integrated into a complex time structure of memory and projection: Ideas and concepts for perspective architectures are developed from the memory of past experiences, and the present sense of spatial exploration. Accordingly, the cultivation of perception also enhances design competences. The more precise the perception of the experiencer, the more differentiated the collection of experienced architectural encounters and memories becomes, which are further refined into architectural ideas through association and combination. Design is a core competence of the architect, which involves clarifying and specifying the idea of the architecture one is working on. In this superordinate, integrative process, the architectural design with its contextual and typological, its spatial and structural, its constructive and technical, and its material and atmospheric characteristics

is conceived and specified. Concretizing what is conceptualized is an integrated part of the architectural design.

Focusing on lived experience as an essential for the perception and conception of architectures enables an attentive approach to the merely intuitive and unconscious elements of both processes. By placing perception at the center of attention, the individual, subjective experience and personal event of the architectural encounter acquire greater significance: Internalized knowledge about space is constituted by more or less consciously lived spatial impressions, comprising one's memory of spaces. Architectural ideas and conceptions are thus conceived from this incorporated archive of spatial knowledge. Any architectural design is inseparably interwoven with the personal archive of spatial memory and experiences of its author. Accordingly, the subjective dimension of spatial experiencing and architectural conception must be taken into account, as this dimension – beyond the general validity of certain essential principles of spatial formation and perception – is formative for the experience of the built environment.

