

# 1.2 Theoretical Concepts

## Lecture

Week 01 lecture is dedicated to introducing the unit, framing its context, and providing you with some preliminary concepts to reflect upon.

You can access the lecture slides here: [Introduction to the Unit](#) ↗  
[\(https://prezi.com/view/n5065aWdIISQOxr237Qp/\)](https://prezi.com/view/n5065aWdIISQOxr237Qp/)

Recording of the lecture is available in the Zoom tab

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## Style and Language

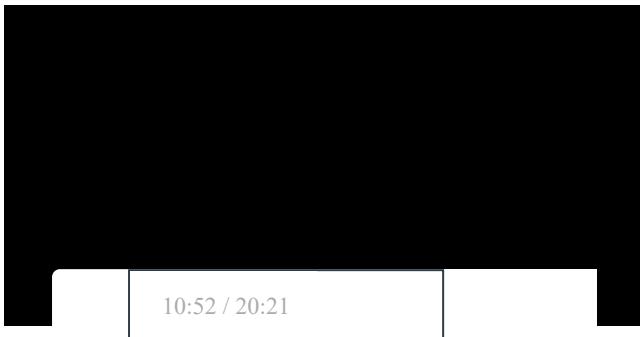
Architects pursue beauty as a means to deliver well-being, prosperity, and happiness in a positive, sustainable and equitable way. Although the idea of beauty is everchanging, influenced by culture and society, Style and Language are constructs that support architects in defying their own identity.



Figure 01. Santa Maria della Consolazione, Todi, Italy

The history of architecture is customarily organised as a sequence of architectural styles; each style is the product of a specific socio-cultural milieu. Architectural styles help us in placing an architectural design within a broader historical and geographical context; they provide us with cues about a broader background that has informed the design of a specific architecture.

Some architects have been able to establish their own architectural style, which then has been embraced by other practitioners; more generally, architects translate the general vibe of an architectural style into their own personal language. It is paramount for architects to develop an awareness of their style and language, in a word characterised by strong recognisable brands, architects are not immune from a reflection on what defines the aesthetic of their design.



## Notes from this Podcast:

Indeed you are familiar with the common basic five senses, neurologists today agree we can confidently work on nine human senses, although some researchers point out we could have up to 23 different senses. So, what are these nine senses? We have.

- Sight or vision
- Hearing or audition
- Smell or olfaction
- Taste or gustation
- Touch or tactition

Senses you might be less aware of include:

- Balance or Equilibrioception, which is the sense that tells our brain if we are the posture of our body, how our body is standing
- Proprioception, which is the awareness of where the different parts of our bodies are
- Thermoception, which tells us how hot or cold a space is
- Chronoception which tells our brain time is passing

Some researchers include in the list also Nociception, the perception of pain.

What is pleasure? We can define pleasure as a state of gratification and amusement that fosters joy and, ultimately happiness. Pleasure theory defines four different types of Pleasure:

- Physical pleasure
- Social Pleasure
- Psychological Pleasure
- Ideological pleasure

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## Firmitas, Utilitas, and Venustas

The oldest treatise of architecture that has survived was written by Marcus Vitruvius Pollio between 30BCE and 15BCE; Vitruvius introduces the three basic concepts of Firmitas (structural stability), Utilitas (appropriate spatial arrangement), and Venustas (attractive appearance). Since the rediscovery of Vitruvius in renaissance time, architects and historians have been debating how these principles should be understood and applied, in particular, the notion of attractive appearance, or if you prefer, of beauty.



*Figure 02 Ostia Antica, Italy*

Aesthetic and beauty are generally considered subjective, more properly, we can consider that ideals of beauty are socially and culturally relative. Historically, we can find canons in different cultures and different societies, these canons provide a system of proportions, often based on the human body, that guide artists in general, and architects in particular, in devising their compositions. The adherence of deviance for an idealised canon was in the past used to assess the quality of architectural design; within the limitations of the canon, architects have however been able to reclaim their individuality translating prescriptive canons into individual languages.



Figure 03 Changgyeonggung Palace complex, Seoul, South Korea

The three classical traditional Greek orders are an example of canons. Architectural orders are customarily associated with the style of columns, architectural orders are actually more than the style of a capital. Each architectural order is a system of proportion that guides the composition of an architecture; orders provide a grammar that architects follow in designing their buildings. Comparing different examples of the same order, it would be apparent that there is not an absolute template and that there are regional and local variances. The Doric order of the Parthenon in Athens is quite different from the Doric order in Paestum, or the one in Agrigentum.

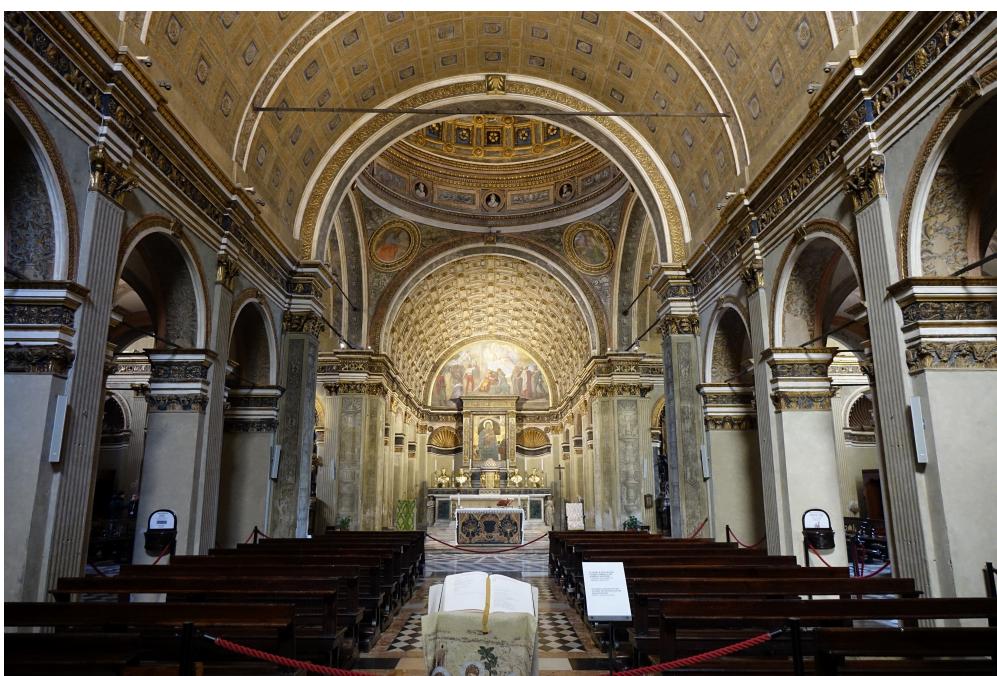




Figure 04 The Doric order in Athens, [Paestum](#)

([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Temple\\_of\\_Poseidon,\\_east\\_facade\\_-\\_Paestum\\_-\\_Italy\\_2015\\_\(2\).JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Temple_of_Poseidon,_east_facade_-_Paestum_-_Italy_2015_(2).JPG)), and Agrigentum

What we can say is that within the broader canon of a style, individual architects have always provided their own individual interpretations of composition rules, individual architects have developed their own individual language. This approach is evident in the so-called Modern Architecture, which roughly spans from the XV Century till the XVIII Century (not to be confused with the Modern Movement in the XX Century); over this long span of times, the ethos of architects was to reinterpret and reinvent the traditional canons of architecture, experimenting with their own personal language and, ultimately defining different styles closely linked. Modern Architecture can be summarised as a general attitude towards the reinterpretation, adaptation, and experimentation with ancient building typologies and with the tenets of architectural canons. The interpretation of classical architecture, often done in an adventurous way exploring new forms and spatialities, was in this period done starting from the geometrical proportions and compositions rules inferred from ancient buildings. This rule, in times, were interpreted in original ways by different architects.



*Figure 05 Santa Maria Presso San Satiro (D. Bramante), Milan, Italy*

When referring to an architectural style, it is always important to remember how each style is the outcome of different dynamics. A style provides a high-end series of aesthetic principles that can then be adopted and adapted in different ways by individual architects. Historically, we can observe how in different times and different regions, we always had a limited number of predominant styles, it follows as a corollary that styles help us in dating a building, and in understanding the specific socio-cultural milieu that has produced it.



*Figure 06. Prasat Muang Tam, Buriram Province, Thailand*

When referring to architectural language, we have to consider how individual architects have explored the tenets of a style and declined them in an original and unique way. Few architects linger on a fixed language and, what is more common, is that architects engage with a lifelong exploration of their own language through different experimentations, informing their praxis with sophisticated research on composition, spatiality, and materiality. If you think of the work of influential architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright or Le Corbusier, you can observe how they rely on a limited number of design principles, which are then declined in different ways during their careers and explored in different ways in different architectures.



Figure 07 Oak Park (F.L. Wrigth) & [Ville Savoye](#) ↗  
([https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Villa\\_Savoye\\_2015.jpg](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Villa_Savoye_2015.jpg)) (Le Corbusier)

Giuseppe Terragni is also another interesting example of how an architect has developed his own language within the broader framework of a style. Terragi was part of the Rationalist movement, which today is classified as a subset of the broader Modern Movement. Rationalism had at its core the reinterpretation of Classical and Renaissance architecture, with particular attention to the simple vernacular architecture of rural Italy. This style provided architects with a method of adapting precedents so as to reinterpret them to design new original compositions. Precedents were analysed in terms of their geometry, typology, distribution and spatiality. These elements were then adapted into new contemporary buildings. Terragi gave his own personal spin to this style; he was a precursor of de-constructivism and his work is clearly identifiable by some specific aesthetic tenets, for example, the idea of the independence of the facade; the composition of the building as a sequence of spatial layers; the use of colour to enhance the elements of architecture; the use of simple, recognisable volumes and geometries.



Figure 08. [Casa del Fascio](#) ↗

([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Casa\\_del\\_Fascio\\_\(Como\)\\_01.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Casa_del_Fascio_(Como)_01.jpg)), Como; Novocomun, Como; Casa Rustici, Milan (G. Terragni)

What we can observe today is how some architects keep exploring their language, we can observe how their work evolves in time and is informed by constant research; we can appreciate how skilled architects respond to the socio-cultural context and adapt their language to these contexts. Other architects, instead, develop a recognisable brand that is quite static in time. While the language is flexible, adaptable and evolves, the brand is more stagnant, predictable, and, in the long course, at risk of becoming a stereotype, the sterile replica of an image. Recently, we could observe how storing brands can outlive their designers.

Skilled practitioners can identify the tenets of their practice, they can identify the broader current or style that inform their praxis and, more importantly, undertake lifelong research to explore and refine their architectural language.

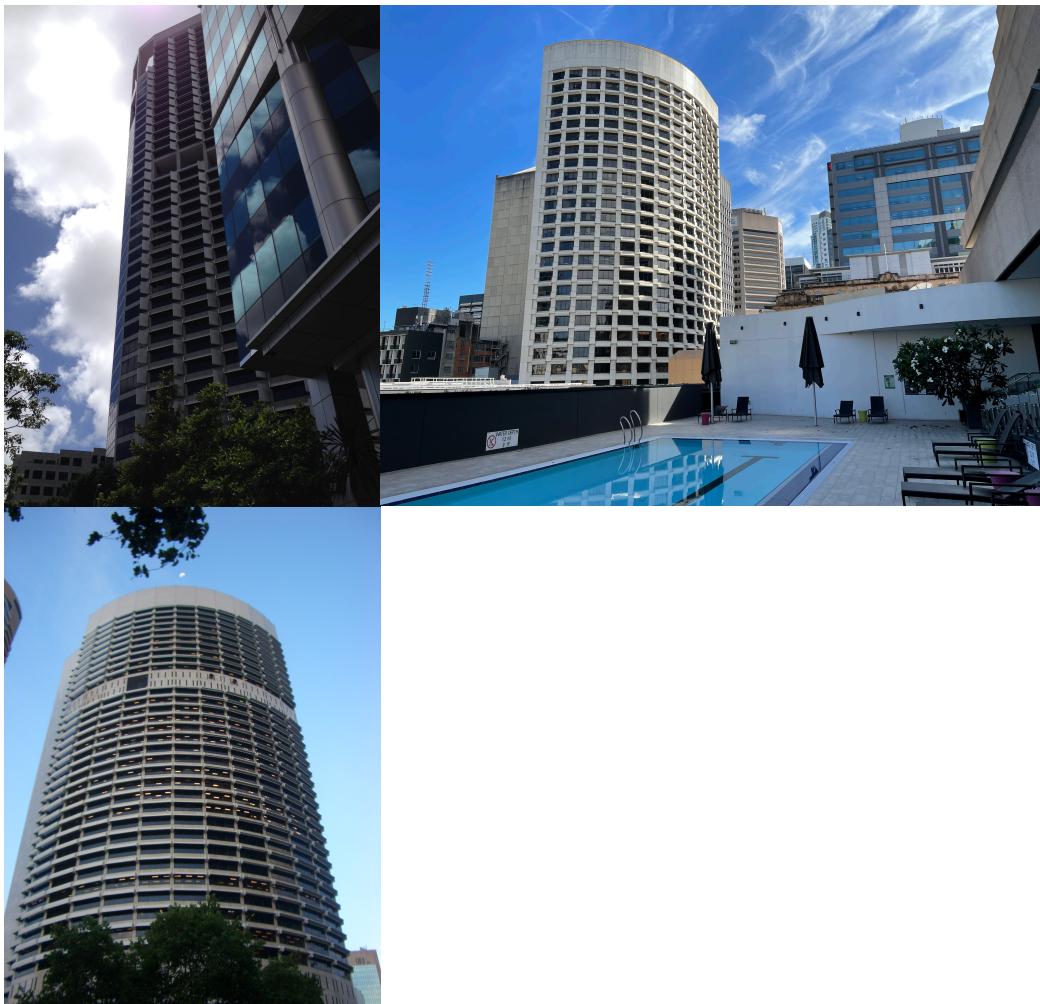


Figure 09. H. Siedler in Perth, Brisbane, and Sydney

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