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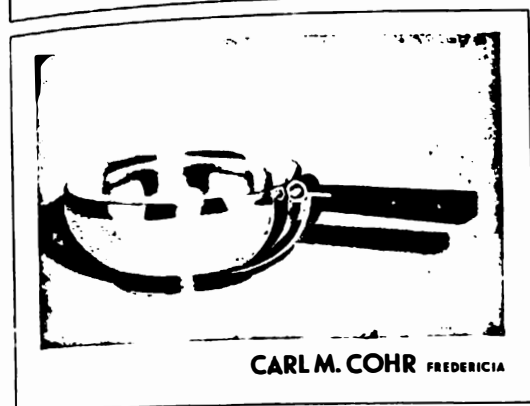
What Is an Ornament?

by Asger Jorn

On the life and movement occurring in all substances

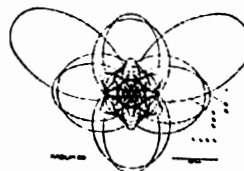
Matter consists of substances in motion that have different composition values and consistencies. At the interface between two substances engaged in mutual motion, we find the catalyst for that which we describe as the wave formation of matter. When two different air systems, moving at different speeds, meet, they will glide over each other, but in their mutual interface area, waves begin to form, which can sometimes be observed with beautiful effect in the cloud compositions of mackerel skies as the air expands and cools down in the 'wave valley' (or at the top) and then condenses as water vapour. We can observe the same wave phenomenon when wind glides over the surface of water, or when water moves over sand on the sea bed. The same effect happens in the desert when the wind glides over sand, or when layers of the earth's crust push against other layers which do not have the same momentum. Moreover, wave properties pertaining to both sound and light can also be observed, and the same goes for electrical waves. In reality, it is the same phenomenon.

Interference between waves is a phenomenon which gives waves a radiating or streaming effect as they move. This effect is formed by the mutual interaction of different waves. One single 'wave former' will send out *circular* waves. This effect can be observed when one throws a stone into water. But a series of wave formers will form radiating waves moving in a sideways movement. There is not enough space here for a more detailed discussion of this topic. The scenario described here is only one way of illustrating the cohesion that exists within the reaction forms inherent in different substances and this includes that of mankind. It shows, for example, that we can (with scientific exactitude) symbolically explain how light moves by observing the movement of water; or indeed explain the movement of electromagnetic waves in the same way by observing the movement of sound and then transposing this scenario to other dimensions. But what is the significance of this where the arts are concerned?



Hvad er et Ornament?

4.140 100



UUTENAMMENT? Nei, en afviging af naturlovene her og der i naturen. I naturen skabes grundlovene selv, og struktureret som en række reaktioner af dens grundlæggende elementer: atomer, molekyler og ioner. De er ikke et andet end sig selv, gennemalt, uendelige, uendelige.

On Stoff's Law of Arrangement

Materien er stoffer af forskellig konsistens og sammensætning, der er i bevægelse. I grænseløst mellem to stoffer i midten ligger betagelige vi man finder næsten for det man kalder materiens *begrænsende*. Naar en luftvej har forskellig hastighed, vil de glider over hinanden, og i grænseløst opstår bulger, der undertiden kan ses meget tydeligt i tegningerne med hen til de uakselte Matrikler, hvor luften udræder og af køles i bølgerne eller toppen og fortættelse i vandingsiden. Vi kan sætte tykke bulger, formene, naar vinden vider hen over vandfladen.



EN ABSTRACT TEGNING: *Not in English* *Forming of products*
arrangement *In development* *new knowledge* *understanding* *role of*
operation *in* *current* *knowledge* *understanding*

naar vanden ghedert hen over haer vanden wind elken i eer-
kenen, naar vanden ghedert hen over vanden, up naar single
jwedlig forskyder up kraftegen i forvald ol ande. Men
igwa wavel lyden om lyets bodge karakter kan uptra-
gen, wavel om elken vanden bodger. Det er i Verkeghen-
den det wenne

[illegible]

Analysis of normalised ratings

Hvad er forskellen på en naturbænk og en naturbænk? Der er den samme forskel, som på at bringe naturen og på at bringe naturen, som på at reproducere eller gengive naturen og at bringe naturen i naturen.

Næringsretten kan overføres uden et erhvervsretsmiddel og oplysnings- eller oplysningserhvervsret, men det er ikke et kommercielt middel, for hvem er oplysning, udførelse, og dette er noget, der ligger langt dybere end den berørte erhvervsret, det er en anden økonomisk forbindelse på næringsretten direkte og indirekte, det er en næringsretsmiddel-lation med udførelse, næringsretten også med udførelse og betingelser.

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AN ABSTRACT DRAWING?
No, a graphic representation
of the swings of a pendulum.
A pattern of movement
whose predetermined con-
text, coherence and variation
is the central structure of all
artistic creation.

AN ORNAMENT? No, a drawing of the orbital paths of a radium atom. Within the most basic elements of matter, ornamentation exists as an objective reality and facilitates mankind's subjective appreciation of all forms of ornamentation, which is nothing less than the grammar of substance; the geometry of matter itself.



Fig. 1. To bølgebildninger på vandets overflade. Til venstre: to bølgebølger, der mødes og skaber en radiationslinje. Til højre: to bølgebølger, der mødes og skaber en radiationslinje.

Mineraliseret bølgeer ikke, men de kan være det, hvis de er i kontakt med en anden væske. Hvis de er i kontakt med en anden væske, kan de være det, hvis de er i kontakt med en anden væske.



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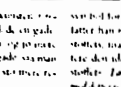
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1 Page 122-123, from: *Dansk Kunsthåndværk*, Copenhagen, Vol. 21, No. 8, 1948.

WAVES AND RADIATING LINES. – Two wave formations on a water surface. At the interface between the two wave areas, radiating lines are created. The formation of waves and radiating lines proceeds in the same way in all substances; this

enables us to use a general analysis to explain electricity, light, sound, air, water; as well as wave formation in soil (or sand) by observing the process in just one place. – Three variations of wave formation in sand on a beach. Basic ornamental elements represented in form creation in nature and its substances. – To the right, an aerial photograph of terrace formations in rice fields on Java.

Metaphysical and materialistic realism

What is the difference between a naturalistic and a materialist philosophy of art? It is the same difference that exists between observing *nature* and actually being *natural in one's self*, between reproducing or reflecting nature and finding one's own nature as expressed in the nature of the relevant *material or substance*.

Naturalism can be used as an acknowledgment device and also as an informational and educational device but it is not an *artistic* device, because *art is experience (empathy and intensity)*, and these things (which lie much deeper than simple conscious acknowledgement) are part of the *spontaneous, sensual effect on a person*. A direct and unreflected experience. They are part of the observer's identification with materials and substances; his concordat with matter and with life. Materialists do not view a human being as someone who 'objectively' ponders materials and substances but rather someone who is a *part of those materials and substances*. Man is a part of nature, even in his most degenerate and civilized form. A human being will always be a piece of nature. And it is for this reason that his modes of expression must also be at one with the way nature and matter expresses itself.

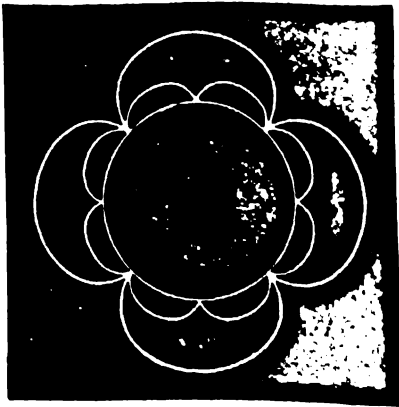
Artistic materialism

Naturalist realism looks upon an object *presented* by a work of art as art's *reality*. If a picture shows a street, the naturalist will view *the street* as reality. In other words, the closer the picture gets to the illusion that it is actually a street and one feels an actual urge to walk into the picture, the more the naturalist will view the picture as being realistic.

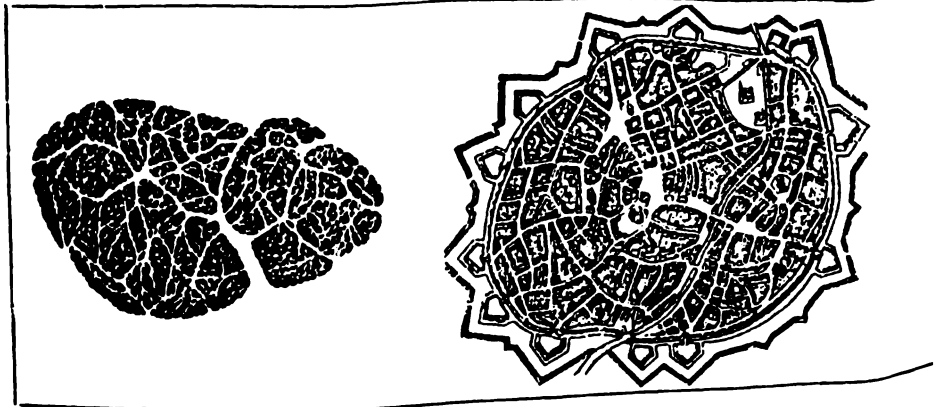
The materialist looks at things in a completely different light. First of all, he is obliged to assert that a picture or image is *not* and never can be a real street; that the street, seen from a materialist perspective, is an *illusion*; that it is (again seen from a materialist perspective) an arrangement of things involving a canvas, colouring materials and oil. In mathematics and science generally, a *line* is synonymous with the track of a particular line of *thought*. For the materialist artist, a line is the track a certain substance leaves behind as it passes another substance. It is the pencil's, brush's or pen's track across the paper or canvas. It is the pin's or finger's track in clay, and the chisel's track in stone. It is the line of plane's track across the timber and the plough's furrow in the soil. Well that's all very well; one might say. But what has *art* got to do with all this? Where is art in all of this?

Symbol or illusion

The naturalist artist tries in vain to transform canvas and oil into a lifelike street by trying to *conceal* the true nature or character of the material he is using. The materialist



1



2



3

1 A FLOWER? No, a representation of the earth's rotational curves within its phases of movement. In every aspect of matter, from the smallest atom to the whole universe, we find the same pattern of movements as those that created, not just flowers, but mankind itself. Everything is reflected within everything else.

2 CROSS SECTION OF A HUMAN MUSCLE AND MAP OF A TOWN IN THE MIDDLE AGES. The natural urbanism displayed by the body and town society. The similarities are just as striking as the contradiction between the natural organic aesthetics inherent in a town in the Middle Ages and the consciously created design aesthetic and unnatural town planning that was a feature of the Baroque period. We are talking about living ornamentation – four-dimensional architecture.

3 AUSTRALIAN SAND DECORATION. Here men have begun a drawing, which is done directly on to the ground. The drawing is then blessed and must not be seen by women. This ceremony is linked to the black snake totem. An outline of the snake can be discerned in the unfinished drawing. (Phot. Spencer and Gillen)

artist never seeks to tilt at windmills. He knows that if he takes a piece of wood and cuts it into the shape of a horse, *it will still be, and always will be, a piece of wood* and will never be a real horse. It will remain, in other words, a *symbol* for certain characteristics that a horse possesses. It will always be a wooden horse.

From an objective viewpoint, it will never be anything other than a piece of wood, subject to the laws governing the nature of wood, but *seen subjectively by a human being* it will bring a horse to mind. This is precisely the effect that the materialist artist wishes to achieve – *to tell other people something* by means of, with the help of the material he is using. *For the materialist artist, the artistic effect comes from the effect the material he is using has on other people.* He has no interest in trying to create a real horse, but rather to enable, first and foremost himself and then other people, to envisage the horse; not for the sake of imagining things but for *the idea he wishes to express*; for the effect he wishes to achieve.

For the materialist artist, it is not just that the object or image that is being presented is a symbol representing a material reality, but in global terms he regards *the conceptual life of human beings* as a reflection of the existential forms expressed by substances and matter. He refuses to accept the idealist dogma that ‘thought is independent of the material’. *For the materialist artist, human thought processes are instigated by the substances themselves, and are synonymous with the reaction form* which these same substances have, because thought (which in itself is immaterial in nature) cannot avoid the natural laws pertaining to matter. It is for this reason that even *mathematics* is for him simply a set of *symbols for something that actually exists*, even in its most ‘abstract’ form. Thus, he is not surprised in the least to discover that modern mathematics, which has long lost contact with the material, is today shown to be synonymous with the material in its basic forms. For the material artist, nothing (not even thought processes) can be immaterial in the deepest sense of this word. Therefore, when naturalists say that ‘artists *should not slip into abstractions*’, materialists simply shake their heads and interpret this stricture as an attempt to *ban the artist from delving down into the very deepest material laws governing nature and substances*. It is an attempt to ban the artist from developing art forms based on the material, nature’s and life’s own natural laws – *to create natural art*. Why does this question create such fear? Because there is a general fear of nature, *because the very idea of human nature is viewed with suspicion*. Let us place this ‘nature angst’ to one side for a moment and attempt, in the normal way, to follow the trail of this problem back to the basic issues relating to artistic form.

The tragic history of the ornament in art

In order to understand the nature of the ornament as a concept, it is necessary to assert the fact that there are two different interpretations of the ornament in art; two different kinds of ornament – *the ornament as monumental decoration* and *the ornament as*

spontaneous arabesque. The typical characteristic of constructed monumental decoration is that it will seek to form a finite whole, whereas the organic arabesque (even though it may consist of fully rounded elements) always manifests itself as a set of elements within a greater whole, as moving elements within that greater whole. Put briefly, one may define monumentalist decoration as *static* ornamentation and arabesque as *dynamic* ornamentation. Dynamic ornamentation is to be found in the art forms of all primitive peoples and in all artistic creation emanating from the Orient, as well as in prehistoric artistic expression in Europe until this was replaced by *Romanesque* monumentalism on the advent of Christianity. This latter art form was, however, gradually subsumed into spontaneous arabesque forms during the Gothic period up to the point when monumental decoration once again reasserted itself over the arabesque in the form of classicist renaissance art. But it's not long before the dynamic arabesque once again reappears in ornamentation during the *Baroque period*, even though it is unable to reconcile the contradiction between object and decoration and retains its classical stamp of being a *decoration*, an *embellishing appendage* on the object, house or piece of furniture. However, in smaller objects, the change was more obvious and with the advent of the *Rococo period*, arabesque motifs gained an absolute hegemony; at the same time the connection with Chinese and oriental art was reasserted. During the Napoleonic era, or the *Age of Empire*, the arabesque form disappeared again, and once again monumental decoration became paramount. However, if Renaissance classicism was of short duration, this new form of classicism was even more short-lived as, within the space of half a century, we find that art forms have switched over to what we here in Denmark have dubbed the *Christian the Eighth* style. This style involves artistic forms where the arabesque and oriental predominates, a situation which is expressed in a somewhat strange way in Thorvaldsen's⁹⁶ museum, where the contents (Thorvaldsen's sculptures) stand in comic relief to the actual museum building, which leans towards an Egyptian/oriental style of ornamentation. The most comical thing of all, however, is that the approach expressed by this museum, with its daring frieze by Sonne⁹⁷, was already out of date by the time it was finished in around 1850, as a *neo-classicist* monumentalist tendency had once again asserted itself. But this victory was of short duration, as within a decade it had to make way for arabesque forms, which in turn had to yield (in around 1870) to neo-classicism. This latter style, however, was then to sustain its greatest defeat since the Rococo period when in the 1890s we see the rise of ornamental *Art Nouveau*, symbolism and Orientalism involving artists such as Rodin, van Gogh, Gauguin and Cezanne. This development came to express an ornamental style which left its mark on everything that was created in art at this time. It is no accident that the artists named here as standard-bearers for ornamentation are cited as individual artists, because a curious *split* occurred in this period, which can be seen to have its roots back in the earliest period of monumental decoration. Where painting is concerned, artists such as Toulouse-Lautrec, Edvard Munch and *les fauves* (the wild ones) bring us into the realm of *pure arabesque*, where no vestiges of classicism can be found – the monumentalist form disappears. This development is brought to its natural conclusion

by the Russian painter *Kandinsky*'s first spontaneous, *abstract arabesque paintings*, which have a parallel in Bindeballe's¹⁰¹ ornamentation.

The split, which here becomes deeper and deeper, lies in the fact that whilst the art forms of the Orient and primitive peoples are seen to be in absolute *harmony*, we see no such thing as pure, classical monumentalist art. In reality, this situation arises by the simple fact that art itself becomes split into *two* systems or categories -- the higher, or classical, art and folk/banal, or spontaneous, art. It is for this reason that classical art has a continuing tendency to 'degenerate', become 'enervated' as an academic would say. Static forms, meanwhile, have a tendency to become dynamic because the presentation of dynamic art is the natural way of things. One can also say that static and/or *dead* monumental architecture has a tendency to come alive.

The economy of ornamentation

The only thing that we can be sure of is that *life* means *movement*. The arabesque is all about movement and organic cohesion and it is therefore natural to regard it as a constant urge towards life, the overall cohesion of things -- towards synthesis. But then, of course, one cannot help but ask the following question: Are these different developments purely *artistic* in nature, intellectual fashion swings; or is this constant switching of trends an expression of different tendencies in mankind's *way of life* as it is played out in successive epochs?

That there is a direct connection between our socioeconomic and political crises has long been acknowledged. The fact that these economic crises have found relief via bloodletting, wars and revolutions where new social classes have come to the fore and asserted their right to power is also an established fact. Nor is the fact that these economic crises, which time after time have shaken our societies to the core, have followed more and more quickly on the heels of each other any great secret. However, it occurs to me that we are justified in pointing to a curious link that exists between *economic* and *artistic* crises. Is it just a coincidence that the fashion for monumentalism, which arose during the bourgeoisie renaissance period, resurfaces after the great French revolution, and also after the revolutions in 1849 and 1871 or rather, we might say after these revolutions had sharpened and clarified class contradictions to the extent that they could actually be classed as counter-revolutions rather than social revolutions. It is not my intention to go into this problem in greater detail here, but rather to simply raise a phenomenon that appears to me to be a common trait and is *the only explanation* for the problems we face today in terms of style and technique (along with the related problem of the many 'isms') and which are having such a catastrophic effect on artistic life. The explanation that is normally trotted out with regard to the plethora of artistic 'isms' is that it represents an attempt by clever artists to attract attention (to appear interesting, in other

words) but this is so superficial that one is almost embarrassed to make reference to it. The idea that an artist might purposely go off his rocker, cut his ears off, or die in poverty in order to appear interesting is just as empty-headed and lacking in analysis as the opposite argument that this sort of behaviour is degenerate and decadent – both arguments are looking, perhaps deliberately, in the wrong place for an answer to the question. Every scientist knows only too well that it takes thousands of years for a particular group of homo sapiens to degenerate but, despite this, the degeneration myth is repeated ad nauseam by every priest, school teacher and college lecturer in our allegedly civilized society.

The Style Confusion period

We left the style problem (the problem of ornamentation) at a critical point – in that period that came to be known as the time of *Style Confusion*, the period just before the previous (First) world war. What exactly happened during this period? How exactly did this style confusion come about – this artistic phenomenon that was the catalyst for the complete removal of ornamentation from everything that today bears the name of modern architecture?

The situation was that as the swings against classicism (monumentalist decoration) became weaker and weaker they had to be repeated with greater and greater frequency until in the end they ended up in permanent conflict with spontaneous arabesque forms, which one artist might reject only for another artist to raise up the arabesque standard. Indeed, it would sometimes be the case that the same individual artist would oscillate between the different styles. This led to some drastic steps on the part of functionalists during and after the first world war just as a new phase in artistic development was taking place. In fact, just as a blatant and wholesale capitulation vis-à-vis the *style problem* in the arts was taking place; a capitulation that quite simply saw the whole issue being wiped from the artistic agenda.

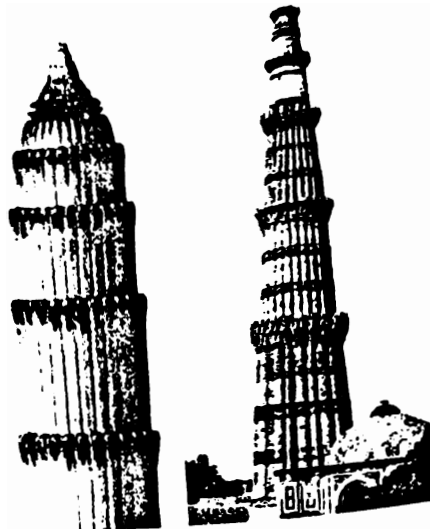
Functionalism misunderstanding the problem

The functionalists bade adieu to the style confusion syndrome by apparently distancing themselves from any *conscious* attempts at creating styles and techniques. They accepted the fact that *it is impossible to set out deliberately to develop a particular style. Style is something that emerges naturally. It must be allowed to emerge naturally.* Thus when the functionalists forgot all about style, because of this quite correct approach, the *functionalist style* then emerged. But what kind of style was it? The whole functionalist edifice collapsed into a riot of shapes like objects in a child's play box where things like circles, squares, cubes and cones could be discerned – a set of common-or-garden playthings in other words. And just like a child's toys, these dead building bricks can be put together in the morning and returned to their box when it's time

1 - SKYFÆLLE AND MINARET. They resemble each other, not because the minaret is meant to look like a plant, but because the material naturally forms itself this way.

2 - TOTEM POLE AND CHESTNUT TREE BRANCH. The nature of artistic creation is not to slavishly copy nature's exterior form but rather to create natural art. Natural plasticity (being in harmony with its own material) will always be synonymous with nature's plasticity.

3 - Flower shoot and ornamental detail from Nordic antiquity
 - Thistle and panel
 - Stem of plant and Rococo mirror
 - CREEPER OR HANDRAIL IN IN ART NOUVEAU (Moscow). These 'free' periods in European art history – interrupted by the Romanic period, by the Renaissance and the empire – surprisingly reveal some similarities. They are periods that point towards a holistic concept of the arts, where artistic endeavour was to meld architecture, sculpture, and painting into an inseparable unity. It is a time of people's art, where the arts abandon naturalism in order to create a synthesis with milieu, nature and life.



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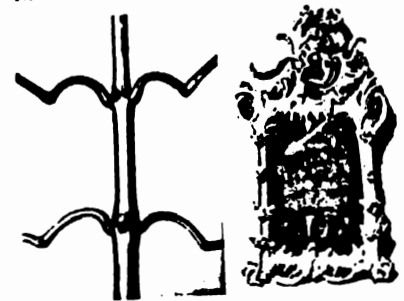
2



BLOMSTERSKUD OG NORDISK OLDTIDSORNAMENT.



TIDSEL OG GOTISK FYLDNING.



PLANTESTÆNGEL OG ROCOCOSPEJL.



3

for bed. But the more these things were thrown up, the more angry people became and the more desperate architects became. Obviously, there is something wrong here. Moreover, a new style confusion has been set in train as a kind of protest on the part of the ordinary man against the gifted experts who always know best and therefore assume that an information campaign and a more cultured upbringing is the only thing needed to resolve the issue.

Wasn't the functionalist programme correct?

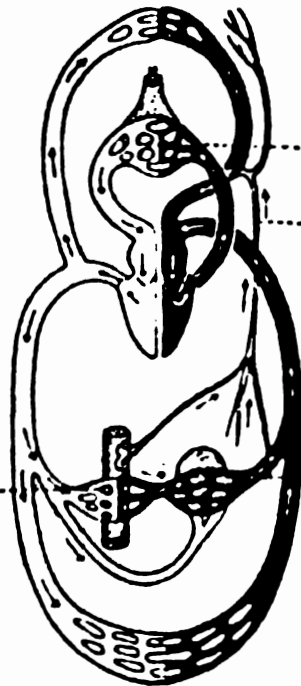
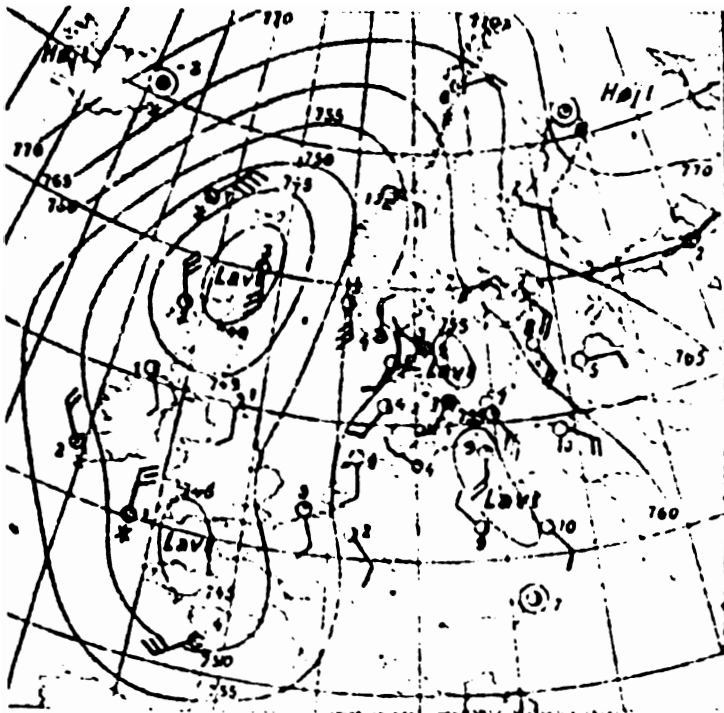
Indeed, it was quite correct. But it was never followed through properly by anybody. *Instead of creating a functional architecture, architects created functionalist architecture.*

Instead of placing emphasis on the actual *function* of an object, the functionalists became more concerned with the definition of *function*; instead of placing emphasis on getting things to actually *function*, more importance was placed on purely exterior matters – to be able to demonstrate exactly *how* objects functioned. Functionalists saw the demonstration of an object's function as being synonymous with the object's beauty and, thus, the object's *practical aesthetic* became the most thoroughly applied rationalistic aesthetic that had ever seen the light of day in the history of mankind. This was to sound the death knell of functionalism – that instead of simply being rational, it became rationalist. Had the functionalists really been able to get objects to *function*; well then, their theses would have proven to be unchallengeable. But what architects actually did was to simply capitulate to the analytical/scientific methods propounded by the captains of industry and elevate these to a set of values *in themselves* – a life goal for mankind. Architects idealized science and human thought processes instead of placing these at the *service* of human *needs and requirements*. The satisfaction of man's needs and requirements (his/her needs in life) is the purpose of all natural functionalism. If a thing or object that man has created satisfies his needs and requirements, then it is *functional*, and if it doesn't satisfy those needs then it just damn well isn't functional. *There is no other purpose to human activity (human work) than the satisfaction of human needs and requirements*, and human need is quite simply our desire to live, to learn and grow as human beings. Thus, no fixed *framework* can be set around the shores of our existence, regardless of how urbanistic and common-sensical this might appear to be. Any framework that applies to our existence must never be static and must also be in accordance with our *natural rhythm* of life as dictated by the natural rhythm of life itself. Human beings are no more able to live in a predictable metronome existence than any other living creature. We live in *rhythms*. So it is not just about creating an organic, living and cohesive architectural style, but also *a living lifestyle*, an organic collaboration between human beings – an *organic society* in effect. When this begins to happen, artistic forms will naturally come to adopt an arabesque form, *because style is nothing if it is not a product of cohesion and cooperation*. Style and technique means movement in space and time. It is continuity. It is natural, the ornamental style – life's arabesque.

Life's intrinsic patterns and arabesques.

Everything that lives is in constant movement and everything that moves forms its arabesques in time and space. These arabesques live and repose in themselves but at the same time they interact with other arabesques, which again are elements of even larger movements, which in turn engage with all that we describe as substances or matter, and of which we only know that there are a myriad arabesque movements – right from the ingenious systems holding atoms and molecules together up to the movement of the planets in space – all circling the solar system's invisible core. We can observe the flowing seas, the evaporation taking place across both land and water, after which it rises to the heavens only to cool once again and condense to rainwater, falling back to the ground so as to join with streams and rivers where the cycle from sea to clouds will start again. We see the air's jet stream configurations making strange ornamentations around the earth and we see animals wandering along their predetermined migration trails, birds following their invisible migratory flight paths; we see blood mapping out its network of red in the bodies of humans and animals, coursing through our veins in its pulsing orbit just like the air in our lungs. People rise from their beds in the morning and their pattern of wandering throughout the day describes their own arabesque of footsteps across the earth. They follow the same routes day after day. Their footsteps become pathways, which branch out across the terrain and which show where man has left his tracks, and then others go along the same tracks and these become roadways, reflecting the abundance of life-arabesques in man, as they proliferate across the landscape and take on the form of these arabesques and then these in turn are reshaped in living harmony with other arabesques until the motorway is imposed upon them like a grey and lifeless band of cement drawn with a ruler cutting through the land without any regard for right or left, life or happiness, and having only one imperative – speed and safety. The end result, of course is that these non-arabesque networks become little more than concrete tranquilizers and people begin to fall asleep whilst using them out of sheer boredom. But here too the remorseless engineer steps into this area of human life and radio apparatuses appear in cars with the result that car drivers never need to pay any heed to what is happening, or rather what is not happening, in the human world around them. One can simply sit in a car on a cemented highway stretching right round the world and listen to exciting accounts of fascinating journeys that other people made. This is the triumph of science over matter; over life itself. It is the triumph of science over humankind; science's contempt for the human race. The fact that the above is not just the mad ravings of some cantankerous luddite (if only that were true) is graphically illustrated by a tragicomic article that was published in the Danish engineers' journal *The Engineer*⁹⁹. This article had the following title:

**'THE USE OF LIGHT AND COLOUR LEADS TO BETTER PRODUCTION LEVELS,
A SENSE OF WELL-BEING AND ALSO FEWER ACCIDENTS'.**



2

1 THE WIND'S ORNAMENTATION – as drawn on a meteorological chart
THE BLOOD'S ORNAMENTATION – as drawn on a chart showing blood circulation.

2 INDIAN SAND PAINTING
A medicine man engaged in creating a sacred sand painting.

3 INDIAN BOY DRAWING AN ALPONA. In India, it is a popular tradition to begin the day by drawing decorative motifs in front of the house door and then embellishing them with chalk or rice flour – perhaps even using flowers. On festive occasions, these Alponas are made larger and more complicated. This is

the social basis for living Indian ornamentation techniques. The only thing that we do, that is in any way similar, is to strew flowers for the dead.

It is a résumé of an article: 'The use of colour in industry' by J. C. Matthew in the English journal *Industrial Power and Mass Production*.

Here, Matthew asserts that if Great Britain is to retain its preeminent industrial position in the post-war period, young people had to feel attracted to a career in industry rather than being nothing more than *clock-watchers* in offices waiting for the time to go home. And one of the most important means of achieving this is the correct choice of lighting and colours in industrial buildings. One example of the importance of colour that is given refers to British minister of Labour *Ernest Bevin's* statement that he was convinced that colours on walls, furniture and carpets in negotiating rooms have an enormous influence on the way conflicts are resolved. (This old man has obviously been affected by an unfortunate colour neurosis from an early age).

And how exactly is colour to be deployed to suit the needs of industry? Well, we are told that the aim is to *nurture* light and colour in factories, offices, canteens, cloakrooms etc. – a colour arrangement which is of a type that ensures not only an air of pleasantness but even a sense of *inspiring* harmony, whereby the strains imposed on the eye are soothed to an amazing degree whilst, at the same time, the risk of being injured when in the vicinity of moving machine parts is reduced considerably if said machines are decorated in various colours.

Colour combinations in industrial buildings can be calming, stimulating, depressing or irritating. Finding the correct colours to suit the purposes of industry is still literally a grey area for architects and lighting engineers who rarely understand the significance of it all. Both lighting and colour have to be made to coalesce. A worker standing by a dirty machine in an area with unsatisfactory lighting conditions will struggle to carry out his work properly. A marked improvement in brightness levels would be of enormous help to him in this regard. But then there is the risk that exaggerated levels of contrast might lead to eye strain. Whilst more light is usually desirable in most workplaces, a change in the colour of a machine from black to light grey, or the addition of a small area of colour at the back of the working area, might yield far better results.

– White walls cast unending rays of brightness into the 'corner' of the eye and, in this way, can be another cause of strain.

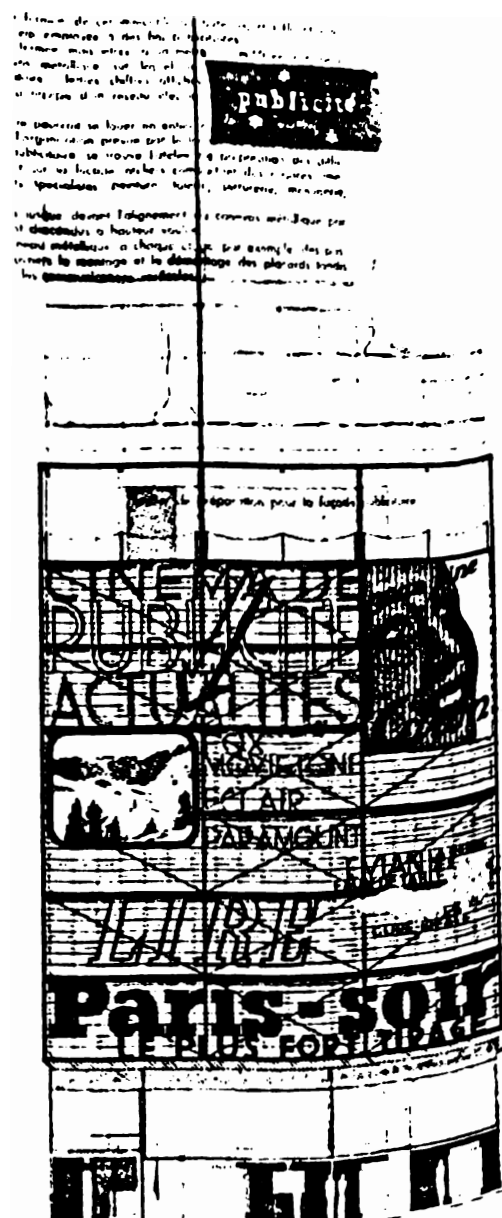
Despite the fact that walls with an uninterrupted bright colour give the best reflexion values, they should not be used because they encourage a feeling of monotony. In other words, a combination of colours is required. However, it has to be borne in mind that whilst too great a contrast will be distracting, uninterrupted harmony will have people nodding off. A successful combination must comprise of at least 3 colours, of which 2 are in harmony with the third forming a contrast. The latter must also take up a far smaller area than the first two. In order to establish which



1

1 AUTOMATIC DRAWING. Chosen from a number of similar examples, which a friend of mine (a civil servant) has done. He always draws when attending meetings, but this does not disturb his concentration. In fact, his powers of concentration are remarkably well developed. The drawings are always produced in a way that makes them appear finished regardless of what stage they are at when they are interrupted. Further detail can also be added to them *ad infinitum*.

They can also be expanded to the sides for as far as the dimensions of the paper will allow. One could imagine town planning being based on a similar principles. – In former times, the Chinese would only offer employment to potential state servants after their skills in calligraphy had been tested. In reality, it is the best test that one can think of; if (as in China) there is a culture of graphology in society.



2

2 THE DYING SCREAM OF FAÇADE ORNAMENTATION. Marketing – it says on the flag blowing in the breeze above this monstrosity of steel, cement and neon lights. Functional Ice. – This is how far we have gone with our 'rational' exploitation of the façade. This is how low we have sunk in terms of artistic culture.

colours go well together, and which would form a contrast, the colour wheel can be used where the colours along its periphery are arranged in accordance with their natural spectrum. Neighbouring colours are in harmony and diametrically opposed, or roughly dissimilar, colours are in contrast to each other.

Finally, it is pointed out that rational lighting and colour arrangements in works departments and machine areas increase production (in one case by 7%) and a range of examples of positive colour combinations and lighting methods is given.

– The whole area is quite clearly given extreme importance in both England and the U.S.A.

As to whether the intention behind it all (so beautifully described in the introduction) is actually achieved, viz – to *get workers to love their factory* even after the factory gates have closed for the day, is not, for very good reasons, revealed in the essay. The fact is that these finely composed words are only hiding the reality that we will not come to love our workplaces simply because they have managed to squeeze an extra 7% of production out of us. However, leaving these bogus justifications aside, the article does contain some interesting and positive aspects. First and foremost, it shows that the apparently completely worthless, abstract and life-negating role of the artistic colourist with his/her *Art for Art's Sake* mentality is deemed to have such a hands-on and practical use that their product can be measured in economic percentages. The article also shows that the 'colour question' is not some abstract problem of aesthetics but rather is a directly *physiological* and *psychological* phenomenon, which can be analysed on the basis of physical and emotional reactions. Next we have to consider the fact that not only do we now have engineers dabbling with issues of painting and colours following the capitulation of architects, they have now moved into the area of painting in the social sphere, *painting that functions in our social environment*. This development is such a crushing defeat for artistic painters and engravers, who have retreated to their ivory towers, that you would have thought there would have been some kind of reaction from them given that engineers are no more able to resolve society's *artistic* problems by means of harmonizing arrangements and colour wheels than they are of resolving the natural *conflict* between workers and factory owners by means of *colour* and lighting. All this is so blindingly obvious that only engineers and factory owners (who normally agree with each other anyway) could kid themselves that they have found the answers.

At some point or other, the engineer walking around with his stopwatch will discover that working capacity is not only dependent on whether the right colours have been painted on the walls – that the *shapes* these colours create also have significance; that some shapes are positive, whilst others are negative in their effect on production. The engineer will then sit down at his drawing board in order to construct different shapes to see whether these might be able to squeeze yet another couple of drops out of the production schedule, without ever once concluding

that he himself is the one who ends up cutting an ever more ridiculous figure. He will discover that, quite apart from clear primary colours, workers also have a need for the odd patch of dirt and grime around about them and up on the walls so that they are not left feeling as if they are in some sterile made-to-order comfort zone. Of course, on making this discovery, the engineer will engineer some dirt and call it a *patina* and proceed to sprinkle it here and there. He does not understand that the discovery he has twisted out of his brain after so much head-wrecking deliberation could have been made by a 6-year-old child with barely a pause for thought and with far better implementation because what's needed here is nothing other than *life*, a living environment, *social living*, a living rhythm of work, a meaningful cohesion to life and a real purpose to one's work. Only this can create a genuine and long-lasting joy in one's work and this joy will not only have a marked influence on productive capacity but also on the actual *product that is being produced*. Beauty does not come made to order. The beauty inherent in work must be created by the person performing that work. Nobody else can turn the fruits of work into a work of art. *The less influence the actual producers can bring to bear on the fruits of their labours the less artistic will be their product*. This and nothing else is the central issue facing modern industrialized technology and the arts.

Originally published as 'Hvad er et ornament?', in: *Dansk Kunsthåndværk*, Copenhagen, Vol. 21, No. 8, 1948.

96 Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844), Danish sculptor [Ed.]

97 Jørgen Valentin Sonne (1801-1890), Danish painter [Ed.]

98 Thorvald Bindesbøll (1846-1908), Danish architect and designer of the Thorvaldsen Museum, Copenhagen [Ed.]

99 'Ingeniøren'. [Ed.]

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