



Peacewise

Lecture at CNAA, China National Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, China, May 4, 2018

Piece by Piece

The modern, in the global reality that we live in today, must establish that the conception of earlier utopias – that there is one and only one truth about the world and life – is an utopia in itself.

The most important starting points of science and art are doubt and curiosity.

As instruments and methods continue to advance, science reveals a larger and larger insight into phenomena, into the microcosmos of particles, as with the macrocosmos of astrophysics. And for every new discovery we must acknowledge that every new insight is at the same time an insight into the existence of even more things we don't know – we understand less than 10% of the enigma of the universe.

The linear European idea that we start with 0, and that one day will know everything, will never happen: the more we know, the more we know, that we don't know, and luckily so.

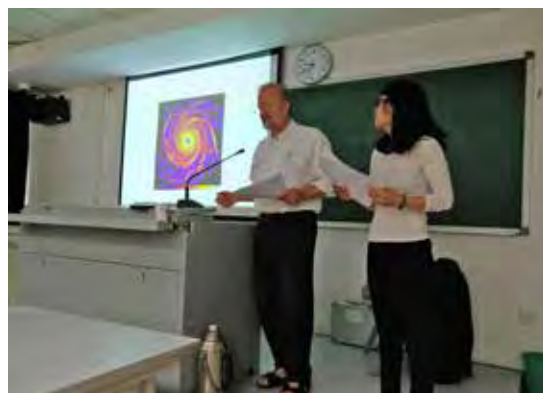
The Danish nuclear physicist Niels Bohr followed the complementary principle in his thinking. We must think of knowledge and insight more organically, or perhaps in a more »Chinese« way; we should not seek after the truth in everything, but be happy over every new insight as though it was a gift; the most important property of objects and phenomena is that they exist, everything else is up for discussion ... Dear young colleagues, you will never be out of work.

Whereas the sciences – through millennia of developing disciplined explanations for their methods and experiments – recognize a determinism based on the phenomena's character, art has moved in virtually the opposite direction.

From the tight bond between traditional art and its social milieu, through the great civilizations' representative exercises in art for the confirmation and clarification of the prevailing order at any given time, to the modern artists' still more personal and diverse artistic expressions, and in our digital and global time, which is without direction, substance and conceptual unity, art faces great challenges.

This chaos can both be understood and used productively, but it also has the effect that irrelevant forces around art, such as the mechanisms of a market economy or other external interests, take over the development of artistic ideas. For example, has Art Basel in Basel, Miami and Hong Kong, with their unimaginable millions, become the standard that museums and galleries must comply with? Curators and art magazines monopolize artistic expressions, both as an assertion of the dominance of global monopolies, at the expense of local and decentralized forms of expression.

Nothing has become more vital than that art can contribute to strengthening respect for cultural diversity, while at the same time point the way to a common global space, where these diverse expressions meet.



Arkitektura Natura

1. The architect shall build with the body, not with the computer.
2. One should not build what one cannot model.
3. One should not build higher than a healthy person can climb ... to the topmost floor.
4. A building that only gives short-term gains must not be built.
5. A good city plan can support several bad houses; one good house cannot counteract a bad city plan.
6. The architect who forsakes craftsmanship and ignores traditional materials is a fly in the net of the industry.
7. Architecture without soul is like a person without love.
8. The house is the most widespread type of monument.
9. What is a home without dwelling.
10. Ornamentation in architecture is a method of organizing the height, breadth and depth of the façade and the rooms.
11. The rhythm of the ornament is what puts the human in relation to the architecture.
12. There is always a house around the corner.
13. Organic organization is human architecture.
14. From humanistic functionalism to market functionalism.
15. Form-Sculpture-Structure-Architecture.
16. One must build a city as though taking a walk in the woods, and we must be the wild beasts.
17. In craftsmanship every square millimeter is touched by the human hand, in industry every square millimeter is calculated by accountants.
18. Love is the greatest architect.

These sentences are some of the points of departure I myself use in my architectural projects. To illustrate, I will show some images of projects where I, with greater or lesser success, have applied these principles.

Art can, through the artistic method, advance models, principles, visions for how we can develop and understand our society and ourselves, but the strength of art is precisely in that we, in the structure of the artwork and the creation of imagery, do not allow ourselves to be determined by political and economic limits; our task is not to say »how«, but to point out possibilities for thinking in terms of new ideas and images.

It is obvious that new technologies, new materials, and today, the digital possibilities enable us to quickly and effectively provide many people with a place to live, as well as develop our cities.

But the technological advances of the 19th and 20th centuries have taught us that every time we solve a problem, we get two new ones. That doesn't mean, however, that we should put the brakes on development, but that development must be viewed less linearly and in a more organic way.

This means that we acknowledge the problems as well as we can, that we look at the disadvantages against the gains. We must research and develop new technologies and theoretically-bearing knowledge, while at the same time researching

and developing traditional technologies and experience-based knowledge – this has, in spite of everything, shown its worth through the millennia and over many generations.

The concept ARKITEKTURA NATURA is an artistic project that seeks to establish a way by which artistic method could more freely bring in traditional and organic methods as examples, which then can perhaps be further developed.

Building with compressed earth was an ancient practice in Mesopotamia, China, Africa, the Americas and Europe; walls and buildings that are between hundreds and thousands of years old stand to this day. Buildings constructed in this way use little CO₂, are easy to dispose of, simple to build with new methods, healthy to live in and will last for thousands of years.

In many places modern architects are already constructing – with earth, wood, straw – new modern architecture.

In the project ARKITEKTURA NATURA's first concrete expression, we unite two concepts: wall and earth.

The wall as an architectonic construction has followed humanity since we began to form societies. The Great Wall of China is the most famous and the largest of them all, but all over the world there are innumerable examples. Walls are an ancient concept we share as people, just as building with earth is a common human heritage that is at least as old. The wall of earth that we built last summer, at Kunsthø 44Møen on the island of Møn in Denmark, is a reflection of our identity as human beings.

We have – in China, in Europe, in America etc. – developed great and complex civilizations that have given the world and humanity a wealth of art, philosophy, architecture, knowledge, etc.

Today in Europe, in Palestine, in the United States walls are being built, but not to commemorate our common humankind, but to establish divisions between people.

We must respect our different cultures and our freedom to organize our society, but at the same time respect that we as human beings share a common identity.

The wall ARKITEKTURA NATURA will turn slowly back into nature, becoming a new biotope.

Ars/Scientia/Iustitia

Thomas More, an English politician, philosopher and writer from the 1500s, develops, in the book of the same name, the concept of utopia, where he speculatively and philosophicaly constructs an ideal society on a nonexistent island by the name of Utopia. Since then the concept of »utopia« has become an integral part of particularly European thinking and a prerequisite for the development of Marxism, liberalism and democracy, based on this notion, that humankind, through its capacity to conceptualize, can develop a yet unknown form of society.

The first utopia in European tradition is the story of the tower of Babel from the Christian Bible. Here people construct a giant twisting tower so that they, by means of their own power, might reach God. But God is angered, and the people begin to speak in all the languages of the world as we know them today.

But the dream of utopia, the dream of a better world, is still alive.

To illustrate this, I have constructed this leaning tower, where there the angles are different from each other. Utopia as a method for thinking and dreaming about something new and better is important. As long as we don't believe that we are perfect. Around this tower of Babel stand three allegorical figures – ARS-SCIENTIA-IUSTITIA: Art, Science and Justice.

It was the Danish scientist H.C. Ørsted who discovered electromagnetism in 1820, and as a man of the Age of Enlightenment he was preoccupied with society and pronounced that society rests on three pillars: »art, science and justice.«

Together with Thomas More's Utopia, these ideals are developed in what we in Europe call the Enlightenment, around the 1700s to the 1800s. Its ideas led, among others, to the establishment of the Constitution of the United States of America in 1776, and to the French revolution in 1789.

The sculpture will stand next to the university in Aarhus, so that the young students today can get an idea of how the thought of enlightenment, science, reason, the justice system and the types of art, in the modern sense, came to be.

While the earthen wall ARKITEKTURA NATURA should remind us of our long and great common tradition as human beings, the sculpture ARS, SCIENTIA, IUSTITIA should remind us, that we today are also modern people who need to develop our society on the basis of the various traditions that have arisen over time.

It is not about either/or, but about both/and.

Zodiac

I've spent more than 15 years traveling and working in China. It has given me an insight into both the great number of levels on which we share the same wishes and hopes, and the radical difference, between the traditions that we have grown up with.

While China has Dao, Confucianism and Buddhism, the European tradition has its roots in ancient Greece, ca. 800 BC to 500 BC, in the history of the Jewish people called »The Old Testament« and in the subsequent »New Testament« and the resulting religion of Christianity.

Going all the way back to the earlier modernism in Europe, we have stolen in whatever way we could from other cultures: Picasso and the Cubists were inspired by African art, Van Gogh and the Impressionists by Japanese woodcuts, etc.

And in the global art scene today, we are all being inspired by everything – sometimes it becomes nearly too much.

I have visited the Dongyue temple in Beijing several times – this very interesting Dao Temple with its grotesque tableaux of spirits, demons, judges and the various dead who await their judgment beyond. They remind me of the painted wooden figures from the Middle Ages in Europe, of saints, angels, Mary and Jesus, also often found in tableaux.

The 12 figures of the Zodiac is an artistic hybrid that interprets these figures into a modern reality.

The tradition that the modern in the 20th century cast off in contempt must now be freed as an important part of the discussion on how we can progress.

My choice of female figures may be an allusion to Mao: »Women hold up half the sky,« or Dao: »Nothing in the world is more soft and yielding than water, but when it attacks the hard and the strong, nothing can surpass it.«

The animal heads are gilded carnival masks, and the attributes are inspired by the figures from the Dao Temple. Here rendered in a more everyday version; all have animal feet in cast iron. In European art we refer to these figures as allegorical »narratives«. Their significance in the story is determined by their attitude »the pose« and by the attributes, »the objects«.

The more I read about Dao, Confucianism, Buddhism, the more complex the innumerable variations and interpretations which have existed through time appear to be. So many masters and philosophers have interpreted and renewed them. Only someone born into the Chinese culture could comprehend the depths of this; let the rest of us – full of admiration – be inspired by it.

Sarcophagus

Like China has its emperors' tombs, Denmark has its kings' tombs.

The church where most of the kings are interred is Roskilde Cathedral, which can be likened to your Ming and Qing mausoleums outside Beijing. Here lie 39 kings and queens. When we in Europe formed democratic national states in the 1800s, following the French revolution, a number of countries such as Denmark, Sweden, Norway, England, the Netherlands and Belgium kept their monarchies. The monarchy served as a symbolically unifying representative of the new democratic nations; interestingly enough, these countries are today some of the most liberal, egalitarian and wealthy nations in the west.

The present cathedral was built in 1175, upon earlier churches and probably even older shrines. The oldest king here is Harald Bluetooth, from the year 980 AD. There are twenty-one kings buried in the church.

In 2003, our present Queen (Margrethe II) asked me to develop a sepulchral monument for her that would be both free modern art and yet part of the long tradition.

As the tomb contains numerous references that are particularly Danish in nature, I will just briefly show pictures from the work in progress, and the completed tomb.