PATTERNING PATTERN : FIGURING THE DECORATIVE

ABSTRACTS

Marie-Anna Aristova:
Locating the Decorative - Architecture and Beyond

Architectural history persistently relies on the assumption that there is a significant, if mostly unexamined, distinction between decoration and architecture 'proper'. Decoration pertains to all that is supposedly superfluous, inessential and 'added on', whereas architecture tends to be located elsewhere, most commonly in the realm of immaterial order. In this short talk I examine briefly the theoretical approach to this problematic voiced by Mark Wigley, considering why and how decoration is fashioned into a critical category in architectural history. What might happen if one reads this category against the grain, if its distinctions are loosened, its hierarchies reversed? What opportunities might open up? Furthermore, what are the wider implications of this 'decorative dynamic' for our understanding of the arts and their position? And how might it also pose a challenge to our way of thinking about what constitutes any given field of enquiry?

Michael Brennan:
Disturbing Behaviour: Inside the Mind of the Pattern-breakers

From the time of creation of the cover of the St Cuthbert Gospels, some Insular artists manipulated expected forms of pattern in unexpected ways. The nature of geometric interlace provided opportunities for such controlled perturbations. Metrics, like numbers of crossings and loops, could be changed, mirrored panels could be given small variations, and symmetry twinned with anti-symmetry. Even when zoomorphic interlace had become the dominant ornamental medium, objects decorated almost entirely with geometric interlace continued to be produced. The large Pictish Rogart brooch, the Irish Ardagh brooch and the late eleventh-century Hiberno-Scandinavian Waterford kite brooch are important examples. The Anglo-Saxon Ormside bowl had interlace settings inside and out that suggest a careful intentionality at work.

This paper will consider cases where ornamental pattern was perturbed and how this could have been done in the service of some purposeful symbolism accessible at the time – such as reverence for Christ and his Cross. Naturally, in the matter of universal truths about near-symmetry and counter-symmetry in ornamental art, the road to ruin is paved with good theorising.

Andrew Goffey:
Abstracting Figures. Challenging Technoscientific Accounts of Pattern Recognition

Following the widespread influence enjoyed by neural network technologies and the increasing importance of machine learning more generally (in an era of massive, infrastructural production of data) notions of pattern matching and pattern recognition have gained considerable currency. As a result of the proliferating production of data (initially as a by-product of but increasingly as the *raison d'etre* for a range of digital technologies), social and cultural activities that otherwise be considered intrusive (or manipulative, at best) are acquiring a peculiar kind of epistemic allure. This paper explores ideas about pattern recognition and pattern matching in the context of a concern

with the rather pliable functioning of concepts as they move across domains of knowledge in what might be called techno-scientific research. Recurring to the work of Alfred North Whitehead in particular and his revised account of the aesthetic, the paper asks what prospects there might be for "singularising" ideas about pattern, such that they might challenge, rather than reinforce reductive practices that, consciously or unconsciously, seek to know in order to control. Can computational ideas about pattern be made to operative creatively, in "ethico-aesthetic" terms?

Jane Hawkes:
Order out of Chaos: the Art of Pattern in Anglo-Saxon England

The art of the Anglo-Saxons has long been considered primarily patterned, and decorative in function. The patterns themselves have been identified as generically zoomorphic (composed of – largely unidentifiable – animal forms). And, as a means of negotiating them, the scholarship has depended on a specific set of classificatory terms, developed at the turn of the twentieth century by Bernard Salin. His terminology (Style 1, 2 and 3), has undergone some refinement, but, generally speaking Salin's Styles have remained the means by which the patterns have been ordered, related, rationalised and taxonomised, primarily in order to date and provenance the artworks; and this approach has been maintained almost to the exclusion of any other interrogative strategies, which might, for instance, prioritise the art in and of itself.

In response, this paper will re-consider the art, applying modes of viewing that are perhaps more familiar in other areas of the discipline of art history, while acknowledging that the designers and makers of this particular art were likely fully cognisant of the decisions involved in creating their work, which was essentially public in its intended displays. By these means it will be demonstrated that Anglo-Saxon art was not simply an art of pattern for its own sake. Rather it involved the deliberate display of variegated surfaces, both complementary and opposing; it capitalised on pattern as a means of disguise and, at the same time, revelation; it exploited visual ambiguity, riddling and paradox; it was an art of complex expectation and sophistication.

Martin Nixon:
Pattern and Coherence in the Palazzo Biscari, Catania

Art history has tended to downplay pattern and decoration. Part of my research focuses on the architectural decoration of eighteenth-century Sicily, an area which has received little attention in the academic literature. In the Palazzo Biscari in Catania, there are interesting contrasts in the way that different architectural patterns are deployed.

Pattern implies some form of predictable repetition or sequence. Pattern is also related to coherence and congruity, where a relationship between the parts of the pattern can be discerned. The first part of my presentation discusses the Palazzo Biscari's sea-facing facades. The two decorative systems of these facades are not coherent with each other. One part of the façade also employs a hybrid decoration which creates additional problems for readings of coherence.

The second part of the presentation discusses the palace ballroom. Here, the ceiling and the frames around doors and mirrors are animated with restless, surging forms that suggest clouds or waves. Unlike decoration made up of simpler geometric shapes, the exact form the parts of the pattern will take is unpredictable. There is a high degree of difference in the outlines and shapes of the ballroom decoration, with no parts being

exactly the same. Instead of the repetition or proportional harmonies that can be read into geometric decoration, the relationships between the smaller and larger parts of the ballroom decoration suggest something closer to fractals.

The surging patterns in the ballroom have an unresolved quality. The flickering movement of the ballroom decoration relates to the flickering, changing reflections of the dancers in the mirrors around the ballroom, and the flashes from their silk costumes. This creates other fleeting, unstable visual patterns.

Sanju Velani:
Patterns Made by Fractions

I plan to discuss the distribution of fractions a/b between zero and one under the condition that the denominator b is no larger than some given number N. So when N is 4 the fractions being considered are 0/1, 1/4, 1/3, 1/2, 2/3, 3/4, 1/1 in increasing order of size. Understanding the pattern formed and its higher dimensional analogue is at the heart of several unsolved fundamental problems in mathematics; in particular number theory.

Julie Wilson:
Molecular patterns: what can we learn from chemical analysis?

Consistent patterns in data from analytical chemistry can provide a wealth of information. Particular biological conditions can be recognised by distinct chemical fingerprints without the need to identify the individual components. For example, a test for B.S.E. could allow a diseased cow to be removed before the rest of the herd became infected. However, to further understanding, potentially leading to therapeutic intervention, distinct genetic features or biochemical substances need to be identified. Biomarkers for useful traits, such as drought-resistance, can be also used in crop-breeding programmes, but it is not just the characteristics of biological processes that chemical patterns can be associated with. Statistical pattern recognition of chemical data has a huge range of applications, including species identification in archaeology, quality and process control and food safety and security. Data that doesn't reflect the expected pattern can be equally interesting, exposing contaminants or the start of a new trend.

Robert Zwijnenberg:
Aesthetics and Ethics. How to tell an artwork from a scientific image

A growing number of artists make use of the possibilities of the life sciences to work with living materials that traditionally do not belong to the artistic realm. The use of these living materials in artistic practices also implies the application of the tools of the life sciences in the arts. Much of this so called bio-art literally comes out of the laboratory and the imagery of bio-art looks often very similar to scientific images. On the other end of the spectrum, there are scientists who consider their beautified scientific images as art, or at least as having artistic value. Is science indeed the new art or can we still tell an art work from a scientific image, and if so, how?