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Editors:

Anna Petrou, Brittany Weidemann and Harrison Brooks

Editorial Advisor and Sub-editor:

Amelia Willis

Academic Advisor:

Dr. AnnMarie Brennan

Academic Advisory Board:

Dr. AnnMarie Brennan

Prof. Alan Pert

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For all enquiries please contact: editorial@inflectionjournal.com

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Melbourne
School of Design

FACULTY OF
ARCHITECTURE,
BUILDING AND
PLANNING

www.msd.unimelb.edu.au

CONTRIBUTORS

Alison Brooks

Alison Brooks, principal and creative director of Alison Brooks Architects, is one of the leading architects of her generation. She has developed an international reputation for a multi-award winning body of work since founding the practice in 1996. Born in Ontario, Canada in 1962, she moved to London in 1988 after graduating with a Bachelor of Environmental Studies and Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Waterloo.

Anna Kilpatrick

Anna Kilpatrick is a recent graduate of the Master of Architecture at the University of Melbourne, having previously completed a Bachelor of Arts at the same university. Following her studies, Kilpatrick has continued to pursue her interests in the intersection between architecture and other disciplines and is working as an exhibition designer in Melbourne.

Adam Peacock

Adam Peacock is a post-disciplinary artist, designer and consultant. Founder of The Validation Junky, an experimental lens on how technology is changing who people aspire to become through brands and products. Peacock is an Associate Lecturer of Design Strategy and Future Related Design at London College of Fashion, Master of Fashion Futures. In collaboration with Isun Kazerani, Peacock tutored Studio 13, Architecture-Fashion Lab for the Master of Architecture at the University of Melbourne in 2019.

Betsabea Bussi

Betsabea Bussi graduated from the Politecnico di Torino with a Master of Architecture Construction and City (hons) in 2017. She took part in the excellence programme at the Alta Scuola Politecnica (ASP) where she was awarded a double degree in Architecture at the Politecnico di Milano. Her research continues at the Politecnico di Torino as a PhD student, which focuses on 18th-and 19th-century urban history and the development of seasonal cities through early tourist phenomena.

Beatriz Colomina

Professor Beatriz Colomina is the Howard Crosby Butler Professor of the History of Architecture at Princeton University and a Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin. Professor Colomina writes on questions of design, art, sexuality and media. She has curated a number of exhibitions including 'Clip/Stamp/Fold' (2006), 'Playboy Architecture' (2012) and 'Radical Pedagogies' (2014). In 2016 she was co-curator of the third Istanbul Design Biennial. Her latest book released in 2019, *X-Ray Architecture*, explores the connection between illness and architecture.

Ben Waters

Ben Waters is founder of Siii Projects and principal at OSK Architects. He graduated with a Master of Architecture from RMIT University and studied at Parsons School of Design, New York. In 2014, Waters was awarded a residency position at Berlin's Centre for Art and Urbanistics (ZK/U).

Brittany Weidemann

Brittany Weidemann is a current editor of *Inflection*. She is a Master of Architecture graduate from the University of Melbourne and holds a Bachelor of Environments in Architecture. In 2018, Weidemann received a Deans Honour Award for her studies. She has gained experience in practice while working at the architectural firm Rothelowman in Melbourne.

Deniz Balik Lokce

Deniz Balik Lokce works for the Dokuz Eylul University Department of Architecture as an Associate Professor. She holds an Master of Science from the Istanbul Technical University and a PhD from Dokuz Eylul University in architectural design. She is published internationally, including *The Journal of Architecture*, *Architectural Research Quarterly*, *METU Journal of the Faculty of Architecture*, and *The Journal of Modern Craft*. In 2015, she published her first book, *Deciphering Ornament: Discourses and Thresholds in Architectural History*.

Dominic On

Dominic On completed a Master of Architecture at the University of Melbourne in 2016. He has served as an editor for *Inflection* vol. 4, taught high school English, and assisted in teaching architectural theory at his *alma mater*.

Dominic is currently an architectural graduate at Kneeler Design Architects, where he continues to mould minds by designing learning environments in Victoria. He is also an illustrator and occasional animator, with interest in the role architecture plays in shaping personal and collective memory.

Francesca Zanotto

Francesca Zanotto is an architect. In 2018 she was awarded a PhD from the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies at the Politecnico di Milano where she also teaches. Her research focuses on the implications of changing consumption, economical and political patterns for architecture and design culture. She was a visiting PhD candidate at Delft University of Technology, studying the application of the paradigm of circular economies and the design of the built environment.

Hannah Wood

Hannah Wood is an architect and writer currently based in Tanzania, East Africa. She received her Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Sheffield in the UK and Master of Architecture from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. Wood's ongoing 'Futures' column for online publication *Archinect* is widely followed within the industry, the column explores technological developments set to shape the architectural profession in the coming decades.

James Boden

James Boden is a current student of the Master of Architecture programme at the University of Melbourne. Boden holds a Bachelor of Design in Architecture from the University of Sydney. In the past, he has worked for Candalepas Associates. Boden is interested in modest design approaches to housing and affordability and in channelling appropriate materiality that is both sustainable and endemic to its location.

John Paul Rysavy

John Paul Rysavy is an architect and collaborator in the design and research practice And-Either-Or. He worked with SHoP Architects, Will Bruder, Brian MacKay-Lyons, and David Heymann. He was a visiting scholar at the American Academy in Rome, the Charles Moore Foundation, and the Alvar Aalto Foundation. Rysavy is a recipient of the Stewardson Keefe LeBrun Grant from the Center for Architecture Foundation, the Francis J. Plym Fellowship from the Illinois School of Architecture, and the Richard Rogers Fellowship from the Harvard Graduate School of Design. He served as a guest critic at various academic institutions and held teaching positions at the University of Texas.

Jonathan A. Scelsa

Jonathan A. Scelsa is an architect and partner in the cross-disciplinary practice opAL. Scelsa's design work has been supported by the New York State Council of the Arts, the Architectural League of New York, and the American Academy in Rome as the recipient of the Mark Hampton Rome Prize in Design. He was the co-editor of the book *The Function of Style*. Before founding op.AL, Jonathan practiced with Foreign Office Architects, Hashim Sarkis Studios, Smith-Miller and Hawkinson, and Bohlin Cywinski Jackson. Scelsa has taught

at the University of Pennsylvania, Rhode Island School of Design, Pratt Institute, and the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

Lachlan Welsh

Lachlan Welsh holds a Bachelor of Environments in Architecture from the University of Melbourne and is currently working at DesignInc in Melbourne. His design work explores the ways in which digital design technologies can pair with architectural theory and history to generate new formal outcomes.

Olympia Nouska

Olympia Nouska is an architect based in Copenhagen and a teaching assistant for the Master programme: Political Architecture: Critical Sustainability at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture. Nouska is a founding member of By•Works, an architectural collective engaged in exploring the social and political implications of architectural materiality.

Sir Peter Cook

Sir Peter Cook is a graduate of the Bournemouth College of Art and the Architectural Association (AA) in London. Professor Cook has been a pivotal figure within the architectural world for 50 years. He is one of the founding members of the Archigram Group, who were jointly awarded the Royal Gold Medal by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in 2004. In 2007 he received a knighthood for his services to architecture. In 2011 he was granted an honorary Doctorate of Technology by the University of Lund.

Sean Godsell

Sean Godsell holds a Bachelor of Architecture (hons) from the University of Melbourne and a Master of Architecture from RMIT. He founded Sean Godsell Architects in 1994. Godsell is a Fellow of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (FRAIA) and member of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). His work is published in the world's leading architectural journals and he lectures and exhibits in the USA, UK, China, Japan, India, France, Finland, Germany, Italy and New Zealand as well as across Australia.

Zeynep Tulumen

Zeynep Tulumen is a graduate of the Master of Architecture Construction and City (hons) at the Politecnico di Milano. Tulumen attended the Alta Scuola Politecnica (ASP) programme, awarded with a double degree in Architecture. She is a PhD student at the Politecnico di Torino. Currently, she is undertaking research on gentrification and neighbourhood transformations from the perspective of inner cities of Istanbul.

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EDITORIAL

Anna Petrou, Brittany Weidemann and Harrison Brooks

In design and architecture, the elusive attribute of *original* is continually sought after, and often viewed as a marker of success. *Inflection* vol. 6: *Originals* explores the contentious notion of originality and authorship in an increasingly digital society. How can architects and designers redefine their relationship with originality to enrich and inform their work?

A preoccupation with originality has become ubiquitous in the design fields; however, historically, this has not always been the case. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, architecture was created from a catalogue of formalised techniques, associated with Classicism and Gothic. The advent of Modern Architecture in the 20th-century heralded a shift and originality became an essential constituent of 'good design.' Throughout the 20th-century, architects accepted this idea as fundamental. Contemporary technology, however, has disrupted these assumptions. As replication and copying become ever more commonplace due to

emerging digital techniques and production, originality becomes ultimately meaningless.

Much of the work in vol. 6 is indebted to the writing of theorist Walter Benjamin. His text *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* noted the significant impact that technologies of reproduction have on art and culture.¹ Benjamin's theory continues to be affirmed as digital reproduction becomes increasingly accessible and normalised. Philosopher Jean Baudrillard expanded upon Benjamin's theory in his seminal work *Simulacra and Simulation*. This book informs authors, artists and architects as they grapple with the proliferation of digital imagery in society today.² Deniz Balik Lokce introduces the theories of both Benjamin and Baudrillard. Focusing on the work of architectural firm BIG, she explains how mechanical reproduction results in simulacra and simulation as design work is cast adrift from its original context.

The phenomenon of Chinese copycat cities is critiqued by Betsabea Bussi and Zeynep Tulumen. The authors analyse the nature of 'simulacrascaples;' cities that begin as copies but over time develop their unique characteristics that reflect local environments. These copycat cities reveal the tension between what may be deemed true originals or replicas. While our relationship with originality is fraught with tension, Hannah Wood and Olympia Nouska are optimistic that the development of digital fabrication technology is reconnecting the architect with the act of making. Although this technology can ostensibly be used to create copies, it also allows for the easy

construction of bespoke elements and architectural solutions.

Copying can also be leveraged as a representational technique in the form of collage, as described in John Paul Rysavy and Jonathan Scelsa's piece, 'Still Lifelike.' Rysavy and Scelsa understand that the contingency of objects placed on a field generate a dialectic between the given objects and thereby form commentary. The ability to collage objects that could never exist together in the physical world is unique to collage as a creative medium. Through art, we can create new realities. On deeper inspection, our contemporary understanding of originality is closely engaged with an understanding of what constitutes reality. The value of manufactured or 'fake' images is that they describe realities that surpass the merely physical. Anna Kilpatrick's thesis project, 'Unfinished Palazzo,' demonstrates a reality constructed of history and culture as she delves into the heritage of Palazzo Venier dei Leoni, a building that was never completed.

If architecture is composed of more than merely physical elements, original theoretical sources are essential to architectural production. In *X-Ray Architecture*, Beatriz Colomina reframes Modernism through the lens of illness.³

In conversation with *Inflection* editors, Colomina discusses the importance of interrogating original sources rather than accepting conventional readings.

In our global society, technology has inevitably unhinged architecture from its context. Architectural imagery is disseminated with ease online and through print media. Sean Godsell is wary of an increasing homogeneity in architecture and describes instead an architecture that is sensitive to the history and landscape of Australia. While he acknowledges the importance of references and sources, he also warns of the dangers of referencing types and forms that bear no relevance to their context.

Mixed Reality technology offers the possibility of an entirely immersive type of copying as virtual worlds and visualisations are created. In Dominic On's piece, 'A Point Cloud Darkly,' we are introduced to a speculative future where the image and experience of Hong Kong is heavily augmented through digital technology. While the digital landscape may be used as an apparatus of repression, On also offers the optimistic prospect of resistance through community-led construction of alternative virtual spaces.

As we shape our public space through Mixed Reality technology, we also shape our bodies and personal identities. Adam Peacock's work elucidates that technology is changing our culture without critical intention. As we manipulate our self-image through digital technology, physical manipulation through medical and genetic intervention is becoming ever more accessible. Rather than letting the possibilities of technology shape our cultural dialogue, Peacock uses speculative design to critique and hopefully shape our social future. In contrast to speculative futures,

current architecture and design is saturated with reproduction, copying and referencing. To look back is unavoidable, but it must be undertaken with care. Lachlan Welsh's piece, 'HyperStyle,' critiques 'paper-thin' stylistic referencing and endorses a more critical reading of the past.

By nature, architectural publications can only describe architecture in a two-dimensional manner. By creating images of buildings, vast swaths of the information held by three-dimensional lived and experienced objects are inevitably lost. The cover of vol. 6 expresses this conflict by depicting a well-known image—the fantasy castle. This type of castle is an embodiment of simulacrum, perpetuated by constant retelling in culture. The silhouette of a Disney castle is modified with architectural references, transposed onto a partially fictionalised Germanic landscape, in reference to Neuschwanstein Castle and the landscape of fairytale. The content of *Inflexion* vol. 6 reveals that architecture and design is unavoidably entrenched in context. Through critical engagement with notions of originality, architects and designers can begin to produce work that is distinct, intelligent and provocative.

01 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969.)

02 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. S. F. Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994).

03 Beatriz Colomina, *X-Ray Architecture* (Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2019).



THE REAL DEAL

REPLICATING AN AUTHENTIC DAY IN DENMARK

Deniz Balik Lokce

Located on top of large rocks at Langelinie, a pier in Copenhagen Harbor, sits the bronze Little Mermaid Statue, cast by the Danish sculptor Edvard Eriksen in 1913. As a unique work of art, it became a national symbol of Denmark and one of the most significant and photographed landmarks in the city. At the same time, it has received extensive media coverage due to frequent vandalism since the early 1960s. Its status as an icon makes it a continuous target, having been covered with a variety of colourful paints, decapitated thrice, her body damaged and her arm cut off once. For Jorgen Nash, the artist who claims to have decapitated the statue in 1964, these events of vandalism show that the Little Mermaid statue has broken with tradition and entered a new era for modern and industrialised culture.¹

After every attempt to damage the sculpture, its surface has been restored. While destroyed parts have been recast from the original plaster mould, damaged ones have been re-attached to the body. Chemical or physical analysis could reveal which parts of the statue were recast after the completion of the original, which was cast in one piece. Cultural critic Walter Benjamin noted that the uniqueness of a work of art is derived from its authenticity. This

becomes problematic for the fragmented body of the Little Mermaid statue, as it is no longer the single piece of material that Eriksen cast in 1913.

The history of the statue is a starting point to probe the borders of original and copy. It serves to spotlight Benjamin's concept of aura and to explore the limits of hyperreal spatial experiences and atmospheres produced through this dialectic, drawing from the theories of Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco. Exploring two collaborative projects by Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), namely the Danish Pavilion and the Superkilen Urban Park, it becomes evident that BIG uses 'copy and paste' as a design manoeuvre to produce replicas that offer more than the original object itself.

According to Benjamin, the quality of aura is deeply rooted in a traditional work of art. Defined as a unique atmosphere of contemplation, Benjamin grasps aura as an intangible distance between a spectator and a gazed object. The earliest artworks were created for ritualistic and religious praxis, produced as ceremonial objects. With advanced mechanical reproduction, the work of art sheds its ceremonial value and instead achieves exhibition value. It becomes reproducible, leading to the loss of its uniqueness and authenticity, or the "decay of the aura."²

Philosopher Jean Baudrillard's concept of aura shifts, as he notes that aura has survived the Industrial Revolution by being reinvented within the context of pure visibility, commodity, and superficiality over meaning, value, and content.³ This paradigm shift in the concept of aura traces the cultural move from exhibition value to communicative value, from contemplation and self-reflection to spectacle, fame, and advertising. In the seminal work, *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard explores his ideas on copy,

simulation, and hyperreality. According to Baudrillard, a simulacrum is an image that simulates reality and is classified into three orders as counterfeit, production, and simulation.

The first order, counterfeit, is based on the image as a copy and obvious theatrical illusion; the image is distinguishable as a counterfeit when compared to the authentic version. The second order, production, is materialised by mass-production, blurring the boundaries of reality and representation with a well-made mechanical reproduction. The first two orders operate at the level of form, rather than relations and structures, and value the success of the replica by comparing it to the original. The third order, simulation, replaces the authentic with an indistinguishable representation termed 'hyperreality.'⁴ Links to the original source are no longer drawn. Like Baudrillard, Umberto Eco questions the previously-well-defined borders of the original and the copy. For Eco, the objective of hyperreal reproductions is to provide people with satisfaction, ensuring they do not feel the need to acquire the original. Hyperreality, or the "absolute fake," take place of the original and becomes its substitute.⁵



Hans Gerber, *The Little Mermaid Statue*, 1958, Langelinie, Copenhagen. Image courtesy of ETH-Bibliothek Zürich.



Hans Gerber, *The Little Mermaid Statue*, 1958, Langelinie, Copenhagen. Image courtesy of ETH-Bibliothek Zürich.

Baudrillard and Eco describe the loss of distinction between the original and the copy, resulting in equal representations in terms of reality. In hyperreality, the ability to reproduce the original an indefinite number of times becomes possible.⁶ This results in a copy of a copy, or an image of an image. As will be elaborated below, the interpretation of hyperreality by Baudrillard and Eco decimates the intangible distance between spectator and the object, as the original and the copy become interchangeable.

Originals in China, Replicas in Copenhagen: The Little Mermaid Statue

“Don’t you think China already has its share of copies?”⁷ These words belong to architect Bjarke Ingels, who proposed exhibiting the original Little Mermaid statue at

the World Expo 2010 in Shanghai. Visitors would view “not a copy, but the real thing.”⁸ Walking around the European area of the site, visitors observed the Danish Pavilion with its white-painted fluid form, which curved around and crossed itself. Designed in collaboration with the engineering office Arup and the interior and exhibition design agency 2+1, the pavilion rose 12 meters and allowed people to walk through and over. Its double loop form dictated a continuous linear ramp that oriented visitors, both pedestrians and bikers, from the entrance to the roof terrace, where they could have a full view of the World Expo site. A courtyard pool was constructed at the centre of the ground level as a representation of a traditional Copenhagen harbour bath. Central to this pool, the Little Mermaid statue was located as an attraction point.



The Little Mermaid Statue at the courtyard pool of the Danish Pavilion, World Expo 2010 Shanghai. All following images courtesy of author.

Resonating in media and discussed by the government and public, BIG's proposal to ship the statue to be temporarily displayed in Shanghai caused a huge controversy.⁹ For the first time in its history, the Little Mermaid Statue would leave its home. While the statue was away in China, a copy cast by Eriksen was placed in Copenhagen, culminating in discussions of the uniqueness of the original statue at Langelinie.¹⁰ Eco argues that the attribution of fake is perplexing within the context of sculpture, be it a plaster cast or a bronze recasting, if specific technical modes of production are employed.¹¹

There would be no physical distinction between the original cast and the recasting. However, Benjamin believes that the authentic qualities of an original artwork are attributed to its aura and its specific presence in time, evoked by the marks of aging and weathering. Therefore, the technique of reproduction cannot define an original or a copy, as a traditional work of art is singular and therefore, cannot be mechanically reproduced.¹² Although reproduced from the original mould, the copy of the Little Mermaid statue did not testify to history. It was not exposed to vandalism or the close attention of the original. The appearance and the material of the original at Langelinie were merely replicated.

As a mobile work of art like a painting or photograph, the statue managed to captivate spectators in Shanghai. However, its new context of a simulated harbour in a sterile, white container, triggered a shift in its aura and atmosphere. At Langelinie, the statue is a public artwork for the gaze of the masses, however, as a national symbol,

or inanimate celebrity figure, the statue has not acquired exhibition value. Masses consume the statue over a short period, as a spectacle without concentration or contemplation, be it in Copenhagen or Shanghai. In our image-laden culture, its celebrity character is reproduced to create spectacle, fame, and desire. The original aura of the statue is lost.



Bicycle lane and parking at the roof terrace of the Danish Pavilion, World Expo 2010, Shanghai.