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*Copytheft – Cultural Practices
Transgressing Copyright Boundaries*



Disegno

JOURNAL OF DESIGN CULTURE

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“I HATE CHEAP KNOCK-OFFS!”

MORPHOGENETIC TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE CHINESE “CULTURE OF THE COPY”

Dr. Christopher Brisbin

ABSTRACT

Over the past twenty years, The People’s Republic of China has actively solicited Western architectural practices to design many of their iconic and internationally recognizable cultural icons, such as the stadia of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics; the Beijing National Aquatics Center (2003–8), designed by Australian architects PTW Architects; and the Beijing National Stadium (2003–8), designed by Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron. In such prominent cultural projects, Western architectural practices were partnered with local Chinese practices in order to catalyze cultural and knowledge exchange, and, more pragmatically, to document and administer day-to-day building construction. This article explores the philosophical implications that arise when this cross-cultural partnership leads to the illicit copying of Western-designed buildings in China, such as the Meiqian 22nd Century building’s (2012–) re-presentation of Zaha Hadid Architects’ Galaxy SOHO shopping complex in Beijing (2011–14). When Western architectural practices collaborate with Chinese partners on projects in China, many fundamental assumptions about Western Copyright Law, and the philosophical structures that underpin it, such as authorship, ownership, and originality, are fundamentally brought into question. The article instrumentalizes contemporary philosophical discourse concerning the relationship between a copy and its original by applying morphogenesis to the contemporary Chinese context. The article concludes that, rather than re-assembling the creative cultural capital of the West as reassembled Sino-Frankenstein “knock-offs”, China should embrace alternative philosophical and biological processes through which to generate new forms of “deviant originality”.

#copyright, #copying, #originality, #knock-off, #China, #morphogenesis, #identity
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INTRODUCTION

Transformers: Age of Extinction (2014), presents an action-packed thrill ride of robot-induced mayhem that has come to define the blockbuster Hollywood franchise. As the film progresses, its setting shifts from the United States of America to the People’s Republic of China, providing a sweeping panorama of Hong Kong. The scene foregrounds the penultimate battle between the protagonist Autobots and their human-fabricated robotic clones, brought into “being” via the re-programming of Transformium—the base element upon which the Transformers are composed. Modern China, the mythologized land of appropriation and copying, is staged as a battleground between the authentic “original” (Bumblebee) and its “copy” (Stinger). In ultimate victory, Bumblebee raises aloft the head of one of the defeated dopelgangers exclaiming, “I hate cheap knock-offs!” Bumblebee’s exclamation itself is ironically composed from reassembled audio samples of Western popular culture. The scene simultaneously presents the West’s acceptance of selective forms of appropriation and copying, whilst denigrating others. Whilst the West may have come to scorn the culture of Chinese “knock-offs” (Canaves and Ye 2009), the Chinese themselves have no ideological problems with counterfeit goods: they love them!

This example highlights the end of Walter Benjamin’s romanticism and yearning for the “aura” and experiential presence of an “authentic” original that has obsessed contemporary discourse on reproduction, originality, and authorship in creative practices such as art and architecture (Benjamin 1968, Goldstein & Hugenholtz 2012). The proliferation of computers in all aspects of contemporary Western culture has resulted in the removal of the physical trace or “facture” of the craftsman fashioning their artwork (Bryson 1983), as rapid prototyping and computer-numerical-control fabrication systems reproduce physical works with ever-higher degrees of verisimilitude: “With the electronic and digital ... the very notion of original [is] obsolete. Everything is a copy.” (Bosker 2013, 23) The ontological status of the “original” is no longer relevant in a society saturated with an ever-increasing volume of media content and designers that are fluent in its appropriation and re-assemblage. As Jean-Francois Lyotard observes: “Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDon-

¹ Calculation of Chinese annual population growth rate = $\left(\frac{((677 - 451) / 451) \times 100}{7}\right) = 7.15\%$. This population growth rate data was projected over a seven year period from 2013 to 2020. When calculated as a constant exponential growth rate, 7 percent will result in the doubling of the population every ten years. This will effectively mean that every ten years we will have to produce double the amount of resources that we consumed in the preceding ten years; and so on, and so on. “Doubling time” refers to the time required for the discovery of more resources than have ever been located in the recorded history of China. Note: these calculations account for the Chinese population as of 16th August 2013. They do not account for the actual GDP growth rate.

ald’s food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and ‘retro’ clothes in Hong Kong; knowledge is a matter for TV games.” (Lyotard 1984, 76) Every aspect of our consumer life is infused with contradictions of cultural authenticity, reassembled as a complex lattice of simulacra of exotic places, experiences, and identities.

This is perhaps nowhere more prevalent today than in China where the design, architecture, and aesthetic language of Western luxury is copied and consumed by a rapidly growing Chinese middle class with little compunction about the moral, ethical, or environmental implications of their consumption. China’s middle class equated to one third of China’s 2013 population of 1.354 billion, which, by 2020, is projected to rise to approximately 50 percent (Gilbert 2002, Fukuyama 2013). Already three times larger than the USA’s middle class in 2013, China’s middle class is set to grow to four times that of the USA’s over the next decade, at an exponential population growth rate of 7.15 percent. At a 7 percent rate, China will experience a doubling of its population every ten years, which will effectively result in China having to produce and/or procure more than double the resources that have been consumed by China in all of its preceding history.¹

There is substantial authoritative literature outlining adjudications as to the legal rights offered by WTO-endorsed International Copyright Law for designers operating in China. However, Western literature presents limited discussion as to the legal, moral, or philosophical structures underpinning Copyright, other than the quasi-Marxist CopyLeft movement and increasing popularity of Open-Source and Commons-based sharing (Söderberg 2002, Katz 2006). Nor is there an inclusivity of multiple cultural perspectives in the formation of alternative Copyright systems: questions of copyright infringement are debated from a culturally narrow viewpoint.

CHINESE MIDDLE-CLASS “STATUS” CONSUMPTION

According to Julie Juan Li and Chenting Su, the influence of the Chinese concept of “face” cannot be underestimated in terms of its impact on the consumption of goods fueling China’s GDP and the growing consumption of all forms of copied goods in China (Li and Su 2007). Face is intrinsic to all collectivist cultures, which make up one third of the world’s population, but is especially important in understanding the consumption habits of China’s middle class (Ting-Toomey 1988). Face encourages consumptive practices that allow for the consumer to aspirationally project oneself as part of a desired social group, to reinforce culturally accepted norms of behavior within that group, and to differentiate oneself from others external to it (Ang et al. 2001). Chinese collectivist culture, which is Confucian at its ideological core, is “interdependent” in its social structuring: “to the interdependent Chinese, class reflects not only one’s achievement, but also

one’s group, usually one’s family, relatives, and kinship clan.” (Wong & Ahuvia 1998) It is through this very need to “enhance, maintain, or save face” that Chinese consumers find themselves, more than other cultures, more likely to purchase luxury goods to advance their social standing (Li and Su 2007).

Even in the West, “keeping” and “giving” face are necessary components of everyday social practices of what Erving Goffman calls “face-work” (Goffman 2005, 5). Face-work is a form of identity management that involves verbal and non-verbal social contracts that are conducted through either face-to-face or mediated social encounters. For both the Chinese and Americans, face-work is a vital social tool for determining and maintaining social impressions of oneself, and the social grouping one wishes others to identify oneself with. Whilst “keeping” face denotes the ability to maintain a social standing that is internally consistent with the social standards established by the group, “giving” face, on the other hand, refers to the gifting of face to an “other” and, in so doing, to oneself (Goffman 2005, 9). It is through this “face gifting” that the act of copying gives face to the authors of an original being copied as a form of cultural mastery and flattery. This is not dissimilar to traditional approaches in the West to fine arts education (from the Renaissance to today) in which students learn by initially mastering the Masters. Thus, the act of copying in China is not seen as an activity that could potentially lead to a loss of face, as would be the outcome in the West. Face in China thus presents a complex social account of identity construction that directly conflicts with the social standards expected of Western property law and the philosophical and ideological standards which support it.

However, what is being consumed is actually simply the aesthetics of the original. As Winnie Yin Wong notes, the production of the majority of copied European artworks in Dafen (the mythologized locus of fine arts copying in Shenzhen, China) were in fact sold through multinational retail chains, such as K-Mart and Wal-Mart, to an American audience who were unaware of the specific compositional structures of the original, other than its broad aesthetic and social appeal (Wong 2013, 5, 52, 58–9). Similarly, the Dafen painters responsible for the reproductions had never seen the original artworks either (Wong 2013, 86). In fact, the Dafen reproductions were more often than not dramatic deviations from the original artwork: “*Mona Lisas* painted in Dafen are almost always larger, *Starry Night* always thicker. David’s *Napoleon* smiles more, and Yue Minjun’s pink faces smile less cynically. Lichtenstein’s comic strip bubbles can be updated with new jokes, and Warhol’s contrast color stylization is applied to family portraits.” (Wong 2013, 20) Their copying thus concerned with the attainment of an aesthetic likeness to the original, and not the realization of precise and photo-realistic replication. Both painter and consumer operated from a limited disciplinary knowledge of the meticulous ideological and technical characteristics of the original artwork.

Wong further illustrates the conceptual irreconcilability between originals and copies in Chinese linguistics and philosophy in demonstrating how the Chinese understand, for example, the relationship between each painting in Monet’s early twentieth-century *Water Lilies* series relative to copies of them. Each of the *Water Lilies* paintings are understood as iterative copies of an overarching series of impressionistic representations of water lilies. This relationship is conceived as a *gao*, which encompasses relations that exist between versions of a work that can be understood as a series. For example, an analogue photograph, a scanned digital image, or a digital photograph of Monet’s *Water Lilies*—or indeed any other iteration in the study of water lilies by Monet. In each case, the *gao* is simply one iteration or “instance” of an infinite series of representations of the water lilies, inclusive of all of Monet’s *Water Lilies* as a “singular work” (*hua*). As Wong therefore concludes, the “original ... is conferred no absolute hierarchical status, and is merely a *yuangao*, or if you will, an ‘original copy’.” (Wong 2013, 18) Whilst there are semantic, legal, and moral associations with copying nomenclature in the West, the complexity of meaning between original and copy in Mandarin has exasperated attempted intercultural resolution of the contrasting ideas about copying between East and West.

It is also important to acknowledge that the West’s historical attitudes towards copying and replication is equally complex—particularly in relation to pre-modern concepts of copying. There is no definitive singular account or history that sufficiently accounts for the West’s intercultural and conceptual complexity when dealing with questions of ownership, authenticity, originality, copyright, or intellectual property. For example, Byzantine attitudes towards copying in early Modern Europe considered the meaning and embodied narrative of a copy more important than its aesthetic likeness to its idealized original. The apotropaic power of the medieval pre-Renaissance image embodied the “palpable presence and intervention of the deity” in the very fabric of the image (Kitzinger 1954, 119). The divine edict, transformed through *apotropaia* as a “magical object”, was altered into an image, thus making manifest the divine power of its representational subject: in this case the divine power of Jesus Christ (Kitzinger 1954, 104).

This deliberate conceptual transference of divine power was also employed by medieval architects when attempting to replicate sites that were believed to embody particular spiritual or divine presence, such as the site of Christ’s supposed burial in Jerusalem—the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. In medieval architecture, relative or proportional measurement was understood as an effective method of encapsulating the *apotropaia* of a subject (Kitzinger 1954, 105). It was common practice, for example, for the sick to take measurements from paintings and icons depicting divine figures, such as Christ, and then cut bandages with exacting measurements to provide a salutary affect to their afflicted limbs (Kitzinger 1954, 105).

These examples primarily relate to the empowerment of the image through magical transference of divine and/or supernatural power, however the image was also empowered through *acheiropoietai*; the “assumed” direct genealogical association or physical crafting of an artefact by non-mortal hands, or through the artefact’s “apparent” vestige by a direct miracle or structures of institutional power (Kitzinger 1954, 113–15). Thus the image or artefact became empowered through association or mythological genealogy, rather than through any tangible demonstration of divine or institutional power. However, the increasing use of the printing press in the fifteen hundreds removed the talismanic properties offered in the apotropaic copy, where any mass-produced printed book was essentially the same as any other (Nagal & Wood 2010). The copy relied on its perceptible facture, or legible trace of the means of its fabrication, in order to carry its genealogical meaning and relation to its original. However, in the copy, the mark of the artisan’s brush stroke was systematically erased. All that was left was the aesthetic pleasure that the image offered to its beholder.

In returning to the contemporary situation in China: the growing Chinese middle class want to look like and possess the same kinds of “stuff” as the middle class of the West. The consumptive desire for, and display of, Western aesthetic styles, brands, and architecture aims to deliberately promote the social status of the middle class, and demonstrate their good judgment and understanding of Chinese notions of “taste”. Thus, as Immanuel Kant observed of the emerging middle class of Europe in the eighteenth century, a citizen is able to denote their social standing to others by demonstrating their knowledge of the limits and boundaries of acceptable “taste” and, as such, be assimilated within a desired socio-economic grouping (Kant 2000). The effects of this overt need to display their luxury possessions is a growing legal, moral, and philosophical concern in China as the goods consumed are not always legally produced. Supercharged consumption breeds piracy of all forms of consumable goods, not least, China’s recent widespread copying of Western architecture.

COPYING AND COPYRIGHT LAW IN CHINA

In the West, copying is not a question open to philosophical debate. Explicit rules and legislation have been developed in order to control what can, and cannot, be copied. Copyright law, after China’s acceptance into the World Trade Organization in 2001, explicitly acknowledges the protection of “construction works”, such as architectural buildings, as “forms of expression” that are protected from unauthorized reproduction (Hu Jintao February 26, 2010). This copyright is deemed valid when the “construction works” can be demonstrated to be “original” and specifically applied in a “built form”. Copyright only applies to built “expressions”, not to ideas, and lasts for the author’s life, plus

fifty years. The copyright is deemed to have been infringed when the "construction works" are used without the permission of the author, or copyright holder. Whilst the copying of Classical Western architectural styles is common in China, as it is throughout much of the Western world, it is not an infringement of legal copyright. Nor (contentiously) is the Meiquan 22nd Century building's aesthetic mimicry of the built "expression" of Zaha Hadid's Wanjing [Fig. 2] and Galaxy SOHO's Beijing shopping complex [Fig. 1], due to the vague and contradictory definitions in Chinese Copyright outlining imitation and, in particular, originality (Chen 2012): what makes something original? Perhaps the single greatest challenge to copyright today in the West is the breaking down of the ontological status of the object, and the arrival of media forms that only exist as intangible digital constructions of computer code.

In contrast to architectural copying, Wang et al. observe that approximately 98 percent of Chinese engage in computer software piracy (Wang et al. 2005, 341). In addition, up to 90 percent of everyday goods available in urban areas are counterfeit (Ang et al. 2001, 221). Whilst Chinese copyright law protects against unauthorized reproduction, it is not as clear-cut about the legality of consuming counterfeit goods in China. According to Swinyard et al. (1990), the Chinese make decisions about the consumption of illegal goods (the illegal downloading of copyrighted music, movies, computer software, or the consumption of counterfeit luxury goods), based on the socio-political and socio-economic context of each occasion in which such behavior is considered. In other words, their decisions are culturally determined by a simple analysis of the cost versus the benefit. The Chinese do not take all laws as seriously as their Western counterparts in the USA whom are more universal in their adherence to the rule-of-law. As Swinyard et al. note, Americans are "rule-orientated", whilst the Chinese are "circumstance-orientated" (Swinyard, Rinne, and Kau 1990, 657). But how does this newfound cultural understanding effect the question of architectural reproduction in China?; What meaning can we garner from China's ongoing cultural appropriations of high status goods and architecture from the West?; and, what effect does it have on achieving a better understanding of what Chinese copying says about Chinese aesthetic sensibilities and their cultural identity today?

WHAT DO COPIES SAY?

As previously discussed, medieval European society believed fervently in the apotropaic power of representations of Christ to ward off and protect: from the use of medicinal bandages (copies) torn in proportion to images of Christ (the original), to medieval churches (copies) designed loosely upon proportional relations to the Holy Sepulchre (the original), to written documents that cited the power of Christ's



Fig.1.
Galaxy SOHO (Beijing),
Zaha Hadid Architects
Rob Deutscher, 2013

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Fig.2.
Wanjing SOHO (left),
Meiquan 22nd Century (right)

name in warding off disease and violence. In medieval European society, the value of the copy was not based on its likeness or verisimilitude, but on its relational meaning. Inversely, the Chinese subscribe to a philosophical position in which the likeness in the copy is a form of “cultural flattery” (Ang et al. 2001, 221), but absent of the power structures prevalent in Western representation. The Chinese are thus able to disassociate the semiotic meaning that oscillates between its sign and signifier than their Western counterparts who rely upon this binary association to infuse meaning in pre-modern Western visual culture. For the Chinese, the authentic “likeness” of a style is more important than its culturally specific meaning, echoing the Wests’ ongoing subservience to postmodern aesthetics.

This cultural indifference towards the integrity or sanctity of the “original” is further demonstrated in the Chinese appropriation of Western architecture at the height of the Qing Empire (late-eighteenth century). As a result of the increasing trade and cultural exchange between China and Europe, Western style pavilions became very popular. Whilst designs were based upon authentic baroque and Rococo styles, they were structurally and aesthetically transformed into “proximate imitations”, due to the limited experience or understanding of how to construct European buildings. In contrast, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Chinese public architecture was contrived by the State as symbols of nationalism, expressing “grand narratives of the nation, its grand tradition, its heroic revolution and its glorious future” (Zhu 2009, 110). More recently, post-Mao China has witnessed a dramatic opening up to the West and its social autonomy, and a shying away from the austere and inhumane environments typified by Maoist China (1949-1976) and the grand narratives of Socialism present in the Beaux-Arts traditions it applied (Xue 2006, 16, Zhu 2005, 487). It is no surprise that, when left to freely appropriate preferred architectural styles from the West, the Chinese today have embraced a pluralist postmodern assemblage of Western aesthetic styles in order to distance themselves from their recent Maoist past (Bosker 2013, 81).

China has maintained a proud sense of national identity throughout its history that was often in direct ideological opposition to the West, such as during Mao-era China (1949-1976). As Karl Gerth notes, through Mao, “[n]ation-making included learning, or being coerced, to shape preferences around something called the Chinese nation and away from items deemed foreign.” (Gerth 2003) Thus consumption became a fundamental aspect of the formation of national identity, allowing the Chinese to project themselves as proud agents in the development of a modernized China. Mao’s China fueled national sentiment and identity through the segregation of consumptive goods into categories of Chinese-made and foreign. Foreign goods were demonized as “treasonous”; as a deliberate mechanism of the State through which to instill a sense of nationalist pride and

preference for the consumption of Chinese-produced goods (Gerth 2003, 3). The contention of this article is that China’s contemporary “knock-off” culture is rooted in this commodification of nationalism. However, for the middle class today, the projection of modernity and social status need not be directly associated with genuine originals. Rather, the aesthetic likeness of the “proximate” copy maintains the affirmational allure of the original without the ideological hang-ups of its Western-based production: “nationalists today allow for a Sino-Western space where Chinese can love China without hating the West.” (Dong & Tian 2009)

The appropriation and re-translation of canonical architectural styles from abroad has continued into the twentieth century, evident in reproductions of Le Corbusier’s Ronchamp (1954) in Zhengzhou in 2004, in the reproduction of the architecture and engineering of Haussmann’s nineteenth century Paris in the ironic montage of Tian Ducheng’s 2007 one third scale Eiffel Tower—inclusive of surrounding baroque cityscape. More recently, the reproduction of the aesthetic likeness of contemporary architectural styles has emerged, including a reproduction of Zaha Hadid Architects’ Galaxy SOHO shopping complex in Beijing, copied by the Meiquan 22nd Century building in Chongqing. China has also self-replicated its own vernacular architectural styles too in the contentious 2015 Zhenjiang re-translation of the Beijing Summer Palace—the site of China’s humiliating sacking by the English and French in 1860 (AFP 2015).

These systematic re-productions have altered the linguistic content and cultural meaning of contemporary Chinese architecture. For example, as architect Rem Koolhaas has observed, China’s rapid growth has created Photoshop-based design practices that re-conceptualize the content of architectural projects as reductive aesthetic symbols of success and power (Koolhaas et al. 2000). Architectural design praxis thus becomes an exercise in “cut-and-paste” reassemblage. Importantly, the socio-political power structures that are embedded within the collaged fragments are thus removed from their original cultural context; their culturally specific meaning disrupted and potentially destroyed. Any cultural meaning inherent in the original is distorted through its systematic compositional fragmentation and replaced with affirmational signs and symbols of familiar Western aesthetic brands and architectural styles.

It could be further argued that this cultural ambivalence to the integrity of the original is further entrenched in China’s feudal history; its historically undulating territorial boundaries, its ongoing subsuming of other cultural minority groups and their own culturally specific laws and rituals, and its ever-evolving ideological context—more recently from communism to “commu-capitalism”. (Spence 1990) In so doing, the culturally and place-specific value of the original is eroded; subsumed and altered through systematic reproductions that render its copies ontologically flat. It is important to re-

² Here I am referring specifically to the formation of the Magna Carta in 1215 and its effect upon cultural attitudes towards the rule-of-law, civil liberty, and ultimately, democracy (Linebaugh 2009). According to Siegan, whilst the Americans had effectively discontinued their political subservience to England, they still relied foundationally upon English common law in supporting the development of their own Constitution and Bill of Rights.

member that China has only achieved relative political and economic stability in the late-twentieth century post-Mao, whilst the West has had over 800 years to gradually entrench intellectual property rights at the core of its cultural ethos.² Basic human rights, intellectual property, and copyright are all relatively new concepts in a culture whose success has historically been defined by the strength of a sharing collective. Ideas are not owned by an individual, but for the advancement of Chinese society as a whole. It is therefore clear that China’s historical attitude towards the borrowing of another culture’s aesthetic language is complex. Further, as I have attempted to demonstrate, the legacy of China’s historical aesthetic appropriations continues to affect China’s ongoing identity formation today; built upon a deliberate State endorsed system of cultural appropriation and re-translations of the aesthetics of other cultures in presenting itself as a powerful modern nation.

The widespread copying of Western styles in China can therefore be understood as a combination of “fantasy dreamscapes and simulscapes” (Bosker 2013), “theme-park simulacra” (Baudrillard 1994), and ‘hyper-realities’ (Eco 1986, 26), that have resulted in an interesting cultural collision of aesthetic form and cultural pragmatism. For example, many new Western-styled buildings are being refurbished in order to accommodate the specific cultural rituals of everyday Chinese life (Bosker 2013, 51-55). Here Henri Lefebvre’s conception of “conceived” versus “lived” space is instrumentally useful through the acknowledgement of the contradictions inherent between an idealized space, represented by an aesthetic style, and its actual culturally specific inhabitation (Lefebvre 1991, 38-9). The Chinese actively dwell in a pluralist postmodern milieu of hyper-real surfaces, images, and simulated environments: The Chinese exist in the age of the simulacra (Baudrillard 1994). Contemporary China fashions itself as a simulacra of other cultures’ cultural production. However, Chinese attitudes to this trend are shifting. In 2014 at a literary symposium, Xi Jinping (President of the People’s Republic of China) cited a series of contemporary architectural projects across Beijing, such as OMA’s CCTV building (2002–08, facetiously nicknamed Big Pants for its striking silhouette’s similarity to a pair of pants), Zaha Hadid’s Galaxy SOHO (2011–14) and Wangjing SOHO (2009–14), Herzog & de Meuron’s Beijing National Stadium (2003–08, commonly nicknamed the Bird’s Nest), and PTW Architect’s Beijing National Aquatics Centre (2003–08, commonly nicknamed the Water Cube), in openly calling for an end to the “strange looking buildings” being built across China (Abkowitz and Si 2014). President Xi’s ultimate goal is to see a more Chinese-based spirituality embedded within its contemporary architecture (whether designed by foreigners or locals), that expresses a conscious social responsibility to the Chinese who will occupy them (Rivers & Chung 2016).

DEVIANT ORIGINALITY THROUGH MORPHOGENESIS

In returning to the *Transformers* anecdote, the relationship between Bumblebee and its copy (Stinger) demonstrates Greg Lynn’s notion of the “primitive” geometric arrangement upon which all subsequent formal adaptations are based in transforming from one type to another (Lynn 1995, 39). Lynn’s “primitive” can be understood as the locus, or initial neo-platonic form, upon which “deviations and derivations” can be described (Culler 2007). The system of parametric relations that give shape to Bumblebee’s doppelgangers can only replicate certain aspects of its form, not its operational behavior or sentience. They are simplistic re-imaginings of Bumblebee’s visual “likeness”. The relationship thus shared between Bumblebee and Stinger demonstrates the inescapability of the “original” from its systematized parametric copies. Thus, the copy can always be differentiated from its “original” the degree to which it varies contributing to a quantification of its “deviant originality”, or deviation from its original “primitive” form.

Hadid’s growing family of iterative SOHO copies in China further emphasize this point: they do not deviate far from the “primitive” coding that underpins each architectural variation. In collaboration with Patrik Schumacher, author and leading contemporary thinker in computational-based design approaches, Hadid is generating a family of SOHO siblings across China that are generated from a common morphogenetic genome. Whilst similar in their formal language and aesthetic composition, the siblings are the outcome of a complex array of inter-relational rules that govern their growth. Their originality is embedded in their genetic structure: their spatial form is simply a manifestation of this structure. As in all such bio-mimicry-based systems, there is always a phenotype, or dominant presence of one genetic primitive over another; in this case the pragmatics of Chinese cultural ritual over the likeness to Western aesthetic Style. But, does it have to be an either/or binary situation?

Other systems, processes, or ecologies may be drawn from Nature to provide alternative insights through which to critique processes of design production, and equally cultural production. Morphogenesis, understood as the biological process through which an organism develops its form, provides a useful alternative lens through which to rethink the methods through which copies relate to their original. “Hopeful monsters” was a concept introduced by evolutionary biologists to envisage the mutations that deviate from the axial directionality of a conventional growth pattern (Weinstock 2008, 172). Architectural theorists, Peter Eisenman and Andrew Benjamin, have also problematized this relationship, identifying that our inability to transcend a logocentric idea of architecture leads to the regurgitation of familiar “traditional” solutions that are incapable of addressing emerging problems today (Benjamin 1997, Eisenman 1984). These

“hopeful monsters” parallel Mark Burry’s own search for a computational-based language through which to understand and describe Antoni Gaudí’s incomplete Sagrada Família Cathedral in Barcelona (1882–) (Burry 2005). Through the morphing of one geometric state (e.g. cube) along a set axis towards another (e.g. cone), Burry sought to forensically interrogate the remnant fragments of Sagrada Família in order to reveal its formal language. In so doing, a parametricized process of formal morphing was applied as a research methodology to read, understand, and emulate Gaudí’s architectural language. Existing fragments of the building were reduced to their base geometries and closely studied. Computer animation allows for these existing geometries to be extrapolated, to form the syntax by which the completion of the building’s form could be proposed. When these deviations and deformations expanded beyond the expected normative pathways for Weinstock, or the Cartesian system used to conventionally describe geometric characteristics for Burry, wholly new “deviant originals” were thus created. Thus the promise of morphogenesis is, in no small part, to break or transcend the limitations of existing normative models of design; or in the context of this article, the interchange between East and West in engendering a new form of Chinese-based “deviant originality”.

Burry’s diagramming of formal deviations allows for a critique of how an architectural language and conceptual parameters for the growth of a system is traditionally arrived at. What Burry’s deviations progressively elucidate is how these conventional transitions can be overcome by mutating the forms into wholly new trajectories. But there has to be a catalyst or agent that enacts this radical shift in thinking for the system to change. If we reconsider the method of morphing along defined morphogenetic axes in transforming between different recognizable formal outcomes in the Autobot—from its anthropomorphic human-like self to its camouflaged secondary state as car, boat, plane, dinosaur, or insect, etc.—we are provided with a genetic code through which to program the morphogenetic structure of subsequent iterations of the system. Similarly, if we consider the axial development between the copy and its original, between East and West or West to East, we are provided with an insightful alternative morphogenetic-based conception of how China might reframe its conceptual interaction with the West through “potentials for collaboration and opportunities for bi-directional knowledge transfers.” (Roudavski 2009, 346) However, as Tim McGinley has identified, wholly new conceptions of the architectural design process can be defined if these axes of development are reconceived through other biological examples, such as the application of the axial growth patterns of the *drosophila melanogaster* (common fruit fly) to the critical rethinking of axes applied in the design of architectural form (McGinley 2015, 6–7). Whilst McGinley’s focus is on the adaptation of natural growth systems to architecture, it can be equally applied in rethinking how

cities (as a complex suite of interrelated ecologies) grow and, in so doing, how the cultural ingredients or parameters of its growth might be infused in a process of identify formation. For example, when multiple transformers are combined through inter-operative transmutation an alternative hybrid is created that directly challenges the familiar relation to an original “primitive” form or reliance upon fixed loci in which design operations occur. This third state can be understood as a mutation, or as a deviation from a known axial developmental evolution between fixed states of being: This is how Nature innovates, adapts, and evolves. Morphogenesis thus becomes a critical tool in questioning assumptions about how China will develop its own specific identity that is not based on replications of the aesthetic Styles of the West.

CONCLUSION

In returning to the article’s primary focus upon the status consumption of copied goods in China: it is argued that morphogenesis provides an alternative structure through which to understand how China might transcend the reductive appropriation and copying of the aesthetic styles and architecture of the West. China must reflect on the social impacts that result from their obsession with stylistic authenticity and status consumption; exemplified through their adoption of Western domestic planning typologies that are in direct conflict with Chinese modes of dwelling and utilizing space. This cultural fusion has led to dwellings that are binary chameleons: Western on the outside, but Chinese on the inside. In embracing a morphogenetic turn, China can transcend the cultural and aesthetic limitations of Western Styles, and its own hegemonic desires to demonstrate cultural perfection and transnational superiority. The morphogenetic turn provides China with a means through which to combine Western creative knowledge with Eastern pragmatism, deriving wholly new deviant architectural originals that more progressively expresses Chineseness than contemporary counterfeit assemblages in China today.

China is transitioning from kitsch copiers to cultural innovators; from simply mastering other cultures’ creative innovations to generating their own cultural commodity, however a morphogenetic approach may yield interesting and wholly unknown outcomes to this cultural evolution. Morphogenesis offers a liminal state through which parameters have agency on the formation of unknowable material and formal outcomes (Leach 2009). This is dissimilar to the logocentric nature of the Transformers, in that the Transformer is always in a state of transitioning between formal states of being. It is always defined by its taxonomic condition of what it is, as much as what it isn’t. Bumblebee’s voice, for example, is constructed through the assemblage of audio samples and can never escape the linguistic meaning that is embedded within their semantic constructions. The promise of a morphogenetic approach therefore is to assemble

and instrumentalize material behaviors from seemingly incompatible partners to generate wholly new mutually beneficial systems and ecologies. The Frankenstein assemblages that result potentially yield new ways through which to explore the pressing social and environmental challenges of our age. In so doing, morphogenesis facilitates a transformation of the discipline of Architecture through an operationalized fusion of other disciplinary knowledge beyond its traditional disciplinary boundaries. It allows for the transcending of the limiting parameters instigated by Lynn, Hadid, Eisenman, and Benjamin; and the analogies I have attempted to describe through the Transformers-based parametric reproductions of recognizable operable form. More than simply an assemblage of familiar tropes appropriated from the West, morphogenesis provides a structure through which to develop a Chinese identity freed from the pluralistic mish-mash of Western aesthetics.

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