

Log

SPRING/SUMMER 2014
New Ancients

31



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For 24 years I have traveled up and down Manhattan's West Side Highway, passing the tall steel prow of the aircraft carrier *Intrepid* with nary a thought of stopping to board this ship cum museum. This is not to say the retired American vessel, permanently berthed in the Hudson River, is without intrigue; it is a city and a machine, qualities the young Hans Hollein made abundantly clear in his 1960s photo collages of aircraft carriers grounded on rolling landscapes. When 80-year-old Hollein died in April, I knew I had to visit the *Intrepid* to try to understand his gesture firsthand. I took a long lunch and signed up for an official tour. My guide, Ron, talked about the ship's war record and the aircraft installed above and below deck; I wanted to experience its urban scale: 910 feet long, longer than the Chrysler Building is tall, and 110 feet wide, with four inhabitable decks. Christened in 1943 "to bring the war to Japan," Ron said, the *USS Intrepid* housed 3,200 sailors and aviators, 100 planes, plus munitions and supplies, and she saw, with several retrofits, the world's seas, ending with three tours of duty in Vietnam, from 1966 to 1969 – just when Hollein was making collages and rewriting the definition of architecture.

Le Corbusier too was fascinated with ships (and cars and planes). He lined up Paris monuments out of context – Notre Dame, the Arc de Triomphe, the Palais Garnier – alongside the 901-foot ocean liner *Aquitania*, christened in 1913. "The builders of liners, bold and masterful, realize palaces beside which cathedrals are tiny things: and they cast them onto the waters! Architecture suffocates in routine," he wrote in *Toward an Architecture* in 1923.

Forty-five years later, Hollein declared "Alles ist Architektur" on the January/February 1968 cover of the Austrian magazine he edited, *Bau*. "Numerous tasks and problems will continue to be solved traditionally, through building, through 'architecture,'" he wrote. "Yet for many questions, is the answer still 'Architecture' as it has been understood, or are better media not available to us?" For Hollein, building itself was not the limit of architecture: it included fashion, art, inflatables, technology, even a capsule from his 1967 "Non Physical Environmental Control Kit."

What Hollein and Corbusier had in common was a desire to shift the ground of the architectural discussion. That same desire unites them with the authors in this issue of *Log*, although the changing technologies that concerned the 20th-century architect are no longer those of the 21st. The "New Ancients," assembled here by guest editors Dora Epstein Jones and Bryony Roberts, see the paradigm of continuous emergence as "outmoded," and are turning, instead, to "history's history" (although, I would add, not without using state-of-the-art technologies). William O'Brien Jr. puts it succinctly: "Precedents are no longer handed down from generation to generation, but rather are sought out individually and opportunistically." Which is precisely why I took the opportunity to visit the *Intrepid* and explore the architectural ideas Hollein put forth 50 years ago in his collage Aircraft Carrier City in Landscape. Hollein is now history, a history that not only the new ancients would do well to consider. And by the way, radical Hollein had his own relationship with history. Like a traditional Viennese, he could waltz. – CD



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Log

SPRING/SUMMER 2014

New Ancients

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Cover: Cameron Wu and Iman Fayyad, Analytical drawing of Borromini's San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, 2014.

Insert: Parsa Khalili, *Campus Martius East (Trakya Alami)*, 2013–2014, and Cameron Wu, Typological morphology of Borromini's San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, 2014.

What Kinds of Copies?

As with any other creative discipline, architecture submits to a regime of originality. Operations having in common the recourse to already produced forms, such as appropriation, *détournement*, *objet-trouvé*, mash-up, parafiction – well-known critical tools in a wide range of artistic production – still remain unabsorbed and even taboo. While imitation and reproduction are the obvious roots of the last 20, if not the last 600, years of excess architectural shapes, the field of architecture has resisted openly embracing copies, and in so doing has hindered its own potential.

It is important to clarify that the intentional copies we are referring to are not references; they should not be confused with quotations or precedents. They do not establish any link to the lost virtue of ancient civilizations and they do not testify to any particular erudition or affiliate copiers with the great masters of the past. These copies are humbler and less refined than direct citations; they simply reemploy knowledge that is already available and public. In this context, to intentionally copy entails a radical reformulation of architectural imagination: it allows for the renunciation of form making – since form is defined a priori – to focus on available architectural knowledge yet to be discovered.

History is no doubt full of examples of architects copying. Under the Beaux-Arts model, copying, studying, and producing architecture were almost synonymous. Novelty implied subtle variations of the norm. Changes inserted into existing schemes brought them closer to an ideal model. Works were evaluated according to their ability to reproduce the canon – a set of rules periodically disputed and redefined, which beautifully illustrated how the act of copying required one first to decide what defined the original. Even the most radical redefinition of the canon did not alter this logic. The refusal of a transcendental principle articulated by the French architect and theorist Claude Perrault in his *Treatise on the Five Orders* (1683) shifted the validation of the canon from nature to social convention – shared customs and habits. The arbitrariness of the canon did not challenge

FAKE INDUSTRIES ARCHITECTURAL
AGONISM, OE HOUSE, SPAIN, 2011.
CONCEPTUAL DIAGRAM. ALL IMAGES
COURTESY THE AUTHORS.



the pursuit of a greater faithfulness to the model; it multiplied the number of originals. Rather than valuing the operation itself, for centuries copies were the means to get closer to an ideal.

The advent of modernity rather intensified this fact; besides giving birth to modern architecture, mechanical reproduction increased the accuracy of copies and the speed of their circulation. Appropriation techniques like collage or montage, however, did not prevent the myth of originality from hovering over the production of the avant-garde. While mechanical copies drove production, architects and historians exploited narratives of heroic creators – masters whose originality was described as literal origin, a beginning from ground zero – editing out the fact that the novelty

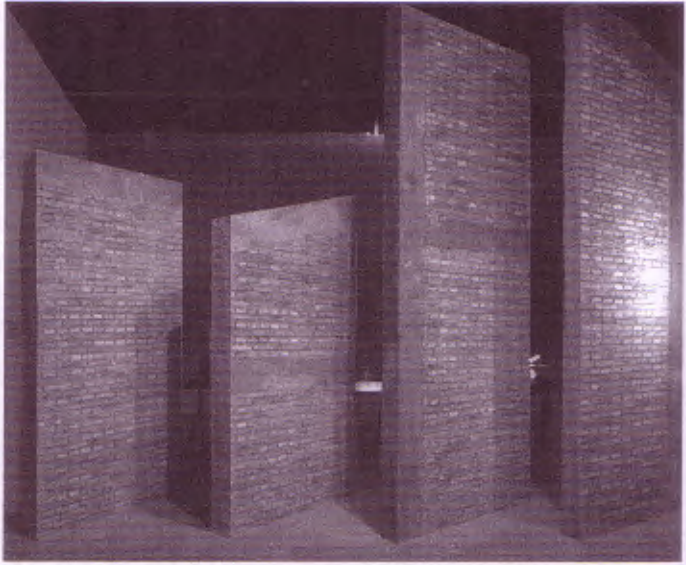
of their production was grounded on repetition. As the tale of "Pierre Menard, Author of the 'Quixote'" (1939) by Jorge Luis Borges exquisitely illustrates, repetition is probably the most radical form of newness. Copies differ from the model they reproduce since they include it, change it, and erase it.

Throughout the 1970s the neo-avant-garde revisited and reanimated works of the 1920s. The various takes on the past ranged from the formalist readings on the East Coast of the United States to the more politically engaged interpretations by Italian groups. The new production was sometimes described as the completion of the never finished avant-garde project, or, on the other side of the spectrum, as stories that unveiled the contradictions inherent in the revolutionary claims of the 1920s. This overtly analytical tone hid the strategic use of copying – again, a careful selection of the original being reproduced. It also obscured a symptom that artist Douglas Huebler best identified in 1969 when he said, "The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more." Modern architecture was old enough, it had produced enough designs to imagine an infinite practice that would only use existing designs. Postmodern historicism openly embraced Huebler's motto. It expanded the pool of available originals to the entire history of architecture, and, guided by semiology and other structuralist tropes, it added irony to the unrestrained use of works of the past. Conceived as analogous to language – the ultimate repetitive system – postmodern historicist architecture seemed more interested in the legibility of witty contrapositions of historical fragments than in the act of copying itself. Copies became mere vehicles to demonstrate the authors' literacy in matters of history, and the commercial success of the trend illustrated how that kind of knowledge could become a prime commodity.

As a kind of postscript, one only needs to look at the last 15 years of both original and all-too-similar buildings in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Closeted copying still drives architectural production.

The attitudes mentioned here recognize that using – stealing – others' work is an architectural tool par excellence. But they do not recognize that copying has radical implications for the way architecture is produced. All arts, especially music, indulge today in radical projects of copying. Musicians tend to denounce how intellectual property law restricts creativity, and the legal control of sources has reduced the artist's ability to incorporate earlier works. In the

FAKE INDUSTRIES ARCHITECTURAL
AGONISM, THERE IS NOT ORIGINAL
WORK IN THIS INSTALLATION,
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ARCHITECTURE.



field of architecture, however, the status of copying, cloning, duplicating, faking, falsifying, imitating, impersonating, appropriating, reenacting, remaking, remixing, replicating, or reproducing differs from other creative disciplines. It is barely regulated and rarely enforced. Against all odds, the way authorship works within the field has constructed one small space of resistance against market forces. Architects despise copies, and in so doing refuse to recognize them, and, by extension, regulate them. In that context, different from other overregulated creative realms, to explicitly embrace the copy will not be an attempt to crack open the contradictions of copyright logics. Instead, it will preserve the way copying works in architecture by revealing an operation that historically has been kept secret. Architects, copy! It is an active strategy of resistance against the commodification of architectural knowledge.

CRISTINA GOBERNA AND URTZI
GRAU ORCHESTRATE FAKE
INDUSTRIES ARCHITECTURAL
AGONISM, AN ARCHITECTURAL
OFFICE OF DIFFUSE BOUNDARIES
AND QUESTIONABLE TASTE THAT
EXPLORES THE POWER OF REPLICAS FROM OFFICES IN NEW YORK,
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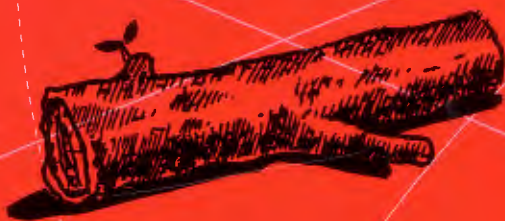
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