

## **The Revenge of the Clones**

‘I don’t look, I find,’ said Pablo Picasso. In the primitive African masks he bought for his collection, Picasso found an inexhaustible source for his own work. Art, in Picasso’s view, was not so much about conjuring a unique work of genius out of nothing, as it were, as of making new connections between the things you find. Picasso realized that you can’t just clone a found original from Africa. Every original artwork is the end-product of a specific context, of a model or a particular prototype and cannot simply be cloned. In most cases, a clone is completely worthless outside the unique conditions under which the original came into existence. Every cloned concept requires a degree of genetic manipulation if it is to be capable of functioning and regenerating in a different environment.

Architects, too, no longer look, but find. The many paradoxes and new combinations that are perpetually and with increasing rapidity, generating our hypermodernity, form an inexhaustible source for today’s designers. We clone everything in sight, instantly turning every banality thrown up by hypermodernity into a design: Jean Nouvel discovered the form for a new theatre during a visit to the supermarket where his eye fell on the transparent base of a plastic bottle. More than ever in our present-day society it seems to be a matter not of creating unique objects, but of making innovative connections between everything we come across in our paradoxical reality. As such, the cloning and, if at all possible, genetic manipulation of everyday forms and organizational patterns is one of the achievements of the creative designer.

Supermarkets are not the only sources of inspiration for architects; they also clone one another’s ideas. There is nothing against this. If it is well done, we advance architecture and learn from one another’s genetic manipulations. The products of Rem Koolhaas – himself an ardent cloner – are now the subject of wholesale cloning by the ‘avant-garde’. Not only does OMA itself engage in cloning, many of its one-time associates merrily clone concepts originally developed by OMA. The office building at Beek airport by Max.1 architects displays a typical OMA style. The playful treatment of the supporting structure recalls the mikado-columns of Villa d’Ava and the skewed columns of the Rotterdam Kunsthuis. There is a further similarity in the use of materials. The modest office building is an original elaboration of OMA’s typical Miesian estrangement. In turn, the work of ex-OMA associates is cloned. The colourful glazed balconies and deep cantilevers of MVRDV’s WoZoCo flats in Amsterdam-Osdorp have undoubtedly inspired Dick

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van Gameren and Bjarne Mastenbroek. Their apartment building on Borneo Island is hung about with large and colourful glazed verandas, that lend the building a dynamic and cheerful aspect reminiscent of the WoZoCo spectacle.

The repeated cloning of the same recipes, such as those concocted in the OMA kitchen, leads to a range of experiments all tending in the same direction. The result is a new style of clone in which the specific intent of the original recipe will be lost without the application of genetic manipulation.

The genetically manipulated clone may in many respects prove to be an improvement on the original, which is usually daring, experimental and revolutionary. For example, the spatial organization of the Vara/NPS building can be seen as a more efficient clone of the camp-where-you-can office landscape MVRDV designed for the VPRO. Here cloning has had its revenge on the original concept. In the Vara/NPS building, Haskoning have cloned the openness and continuity of the Villa VPRO office landscape. The architects have transformed the free-wheeling environment of Villa VPRO into a neat and efficient landscape. A different concept has emerged, devoid of the anarchistic tendencies of the original. As for that 'original', it was itself the outcome of a little genetic manipulation of Herman Hertzberger's Centraal Beheer office. Instead of Hertzberger's non-hierarchical, democratic office landscape, MVRDV opted for a catch-as-catch-can office landscape where everyone has to fight for their own interests. The continuous, staggered floor slab developed for Villa VPRO has in turn been cleverly adapted by Erick van Egeraat in the Ichtus Hogeschool in Rotterdam where all the public functions have been incorporated into a staggered and folded educational landscape.

Instead of improving on the original, there is a risk that the technique of cloning will undermine the original design because of a failure to understand the underlying concept. Here, too, cloning takes its revenge. The architect Eric Wamelink made a collage of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye near Paris and Adalberto Libera's Casa Malaparte on Capri. He placed the two clones side by side on a smooth, green expanse of lawn. The ritual entrance route generated by this juxtaposition of the two famous villas is similar to that of Michael Graves's Hanselmann House in Fort Wayne. This 'photoshop technique' of cutting and pasting can result in a fascinating and well-made collage and it is extremely popular in the market-oriented Netherlands. Unique avant-garde experiments are cloned to order for wealthy, middle-class clients. Such cloned images from the modernist past go down particularly well in glossy living magazines.

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Architecture out of a meccano box. Classicism and modernism as ornament, as recommended on television by interior design guru Jan des Bouvrie. Villa Stokkum is an example of a highly professional made-to-order design. It is a popularization of the 'high art' of Le Corbusier and Libera.

Rather than merely popularizing it, the technique of cloning can sometimes destroy the underlying concept of the original altogether. The clone may (if you're lucky) look the same, have the same expressive form, speak the same language, and yet lack its original intrinsic quality. In such cases the clone eviscerates the original idea, undermines it from within, provides it with a superficial meaning that may even reflect badly on the original. This type of opportunistic cloning, without any significant genetic manipulation, is something our mass culture specializes in – in the Vinex districts, for example. Why make it difficult, if it can be easy? Long live the one-liner! All the 'resistance' and conceptual precision of the original idea is destroyed forever. A wholesale, shameless homogenization is taking place. It is a type of cloning that is extremely popular nowadays. If we think, for example, of the many fat architecture books that have been published in the Netherlands in the wake of S,M,L,XL, we can only conclude that this type of cloning is not very conducive to innovation.

You can even ask yourself what has become of originality in a country where concepts are shamelessly cloned without a thought for the underlying qualitative intent. It is hardly surprising that Rem Koolhaas was disappointed by Villa VPRO. He believed that something had gone wrong with this genetic manipulation of an original concept developed by OMA. That concept, according to Koolhaas, had possessed many different dimensions of resistance. Villa VPRO is an office landscape in green surroundings, whereas the whole idea behind the original concept, developed for the Bibliothèque Jussieu in Paris, was to introduce a new urbanity as an antidote to homogenization.

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