

## Real Fake

Robert Mangurian and Mary-Ann Ray  
*Studio Works*

For this issue of *Oz*, dedicated to authenticity, a thought came to mind that we might explore one of its antonyms—fake. The moral overtones of faking or duplicating, especially regarding the production of creative practice, are most definitely in place in western culture. Spending a lot of time in China where we have a studio and experimental laboratory for architecture and urbanism called BASEbeijing, we are sensitive to the appearance in Western media, politics, and everyday conversation when the discussion turns to fake designer goods, pirated DVDs, or the infringement on intellectual property rights that often turn into out and out “China bashing.” The culture of the copy is alive and well in China, to be sure. But as we have come to know China better and develop a deep-down fondness for it, we have stepped back to try to understand differing attitudes and values toward authenticity, originality, duplication, replication, etc.

Compellingly, Buddhist scriptures gain in value and power every time they are copied or recited. Related to design, capital cities in China were not designed individually through invention, but were given shape by the duplication of a template, allegedly fallen from heaven in remote antiquity and preserved in the *Kaogong ji* (*Record of Inspecting Public Works*) of the spring and autumn period. The word “architect” did not exist in China until the 1920s, when people such as the great Liang Sicheng made their way to the University of Pennsylvania



*FAKE Address Plate*

to get degrees in architecture and urban planning. Before that time there were only master builders who followed pattern books to make buildings. Even imperial architecture involved duplication and import, such as the replicas of Mongolian nomadic tents built in the grounds of Khublai Khan’s palace in Beijing. For more than one thousand years, the Ise

Jingu grand Shinto shrine in Japan is demolished and rebuilt every twenty years. The replication is thought to breathe new life into the spirituality of the place. This would be almost unheard of at a sacred structure in the West where preservationist principles abound. A humorous incident that indicates difference in attitudes toward preservation and renovation

of ancient structures occurred during the “renovation” of the front entry building of the Forbidden City. During the “restoration,” the structure was actually demolished and rebuilt from scratch. So as not to alarm western tourists, an image of the building was attached to the back of the construction screen to make it look as though it never disappeared.



*Real FAKE*



*Fake FAKE*



*Real FAKE Brickwork*



*Real FAKE*



*Fake FAKE Brickwork*



*Fake FAKE*

When we established BASEbeijing in 2006, it landed us in the urban village of Caochangdi. Our neighbors were migrant workers, former farmers, and many of China's most interesting contemporary artists including Ai Weiwei. In Caochangdi, before moving to Berlin to avoid the scrutiny of the state, in addition to his art practice, Ai Weiwei also operated a design studio that he named "FAKE." In the village, he designed and built many projects. The former farmers in the village who no longer have land to farm since the city has grown around them now make a living by building multi-storied buildings on the land of their single-story house. Renting rooms to migrant workers, they are now wealthy landlords. The farmers have taken definite notice of the language and the look of the FAKE architectural projects and of the wealthy artists and art world foreigners who are willing to pay high rents to occupy them. So, in entrepreneurial fashion, the farmers started to build fake FAKES.

From a conversation with Ai Weiwei while walking the streets of Caochangdi Village during the summer of 2007:

*Ai Weiwei:* This is a farmer making a fake of one of my projects.

*Mary-Ann Ray and Robert Mangurian:* Yes, we have seen that there are imitations popping up all around the village.

*Ai Weiwei:* This is my newest project under construction. I made this one in red brick since the farmers are now making too many fakes of my grey brick projects.

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