

Stina Teilmann

University of Southern Denmark

Copying: from Wrong to Right

The distinction between an original artwork and its reproduction became significant only in the nineteenth century. Originals were, for the first time, distinguished and prized not only for their aesthetic merits but for their authenticity; originality became a normative criterion of value in the arts. Simultaneously we find a growing concern with the opposite of original: reproduction and copy develop as concepts of negative value, which represent a threat to the value of the original.

It is suggested in this paper that this ordering of aesthetic and evaluative concepts has determined the way copyright law has developed in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The nineteenth-century dichotomy between the original work and the copy or reproduction continues to be absolutely fundamental in copyright law, though it is no longer so in aesthetic discourse.

The analysis of the distinction between the original and the copy will be supplemented by a discussion of the artist group Superflex's project COPYSHOP. COPYSHOP is the name of a shop and an information forum in which Superflex investigates and re-evaluates the concept of the copy. In the COPYSHOP 'modified originals, improved copies, political anti-brands' and the 'SUPERCOPY' -- a 'new original' -- serve to challenge the legal concepts of 'original' and 'copy' and all that the distinction between them has entailed for the legal notion of 'intellectual property' and the aesthetic concept of 'creativity'.