

# A studio exercise designed to question the concept of originality: An approach to research in architectural education

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## Abstract

What are the possible grounds for practicing ‘research’ in design studio? Design studios have a tendency to assume that the ‘research’ and ‘design’ happen independently and they complement each other intuitively. In this paper, this assumption will be challenged through presenting and discussing a year-long studio exercise for a house design in the second-year level, where ‘researching others’ design work’ is defined as the fundamental component of the given design problem, as dominant over other usual ones such as program, scenario, function, context, etc. The objective is defined as a quest into the diverse and variable interrelations of practices of design and research, in which, not only the design process is defined in majorly research-based means, but research is also redefined as something designed in a highly individual and subjective act. In this frame, the paper will largely discuss the notion of ‘originality’ as a prominent topic in architectural design and design teaching, through questioning the varying means of referring as design actions; such as ‘quoting’, ‘adapting’ or ‘appropriating’; or even generating a ‘cover’, a ‘sample’ or a ‘variation’ in design studios.

## Keywords

Copy, Design research, Design studio, Reference, Originality.

## 1. Research in undergraduate design studio

The term ‘design research’ defines a topic that has been a popular field of interest for decades. In its daily uses, the verb ‘to design’ is usually referred to an act of creation, boldly implying acts of doing rather than of knowing; nevertheless, scholars of architecture keep registering the discipline with a distinct and particular field of knowledge (Cross, 1999). There is comprehensive research and literature on design epistemology that argues the intrinsic dynamics and qualities of design in its association with research and knowledge. Following Cross, diverse ways and types of contextualizing research in ‘design research’ have appeared, differentiating research by, for, on or through design (Frayling, 1993). For example ‘research through design’, the terminology initially introduced by Frayling in his article on Research in Art and Design (1993), was later adopted and analyzed further by many scholars, including Jonas, W. (2007), Zimmerman, J. (2010), Fraser, M. (2013), Grand, S., Jonas, W. (2012), Bredies, K., Joost, G., Christensen, M., Conradi, F. and Unteidig, A. (2016).

Many of such studies and similar others celebrated the process of design and the design product as an emerging medium for the scholarly production of knowledge, increasingly –and inevitably in graduate levels. In many schools, the studio titled as ‘research studio’, often used for graduate design studios, entailed this new kind of specialized design research formations, which generally deals with specific topics such as digital technologies, structural and fabrication systems, new materials, and parametric or environmental design. They all regard research in a more scientific manner, where one can acquire and come up with new information on a particular subject (Furján, 2007; Fraser, 2013). In other cases, the emphasis is on contributing to the accumulated knowledge on architecture through Ph.D. studies. In both, one can discern a shift from the medium of text to the medium of the artifact, as the most prominent tool for the communication and distribu-

tion of new knowledge. Within this upward-trending model, the research object and method started to merge (Mareis, 2016, 35), leading to an increase in the number of graduate studies in the field of architecture, guided by design. Ph.D. by design, the most prevailing topic that stemmed from this flow, started to have an academic validity in many universities as well as an expansion in the literature that discusses the possible means of ‘design as research, or ‘design research,’ where the major question is how we position and justify the product or the artifact as an outcome of a Ph.D. degree. As the nature of graduate studies dictates, the notion of originality stands as the leading quality of the required research and the resulting artifact in all such cases<sup>1</sup>. The senior design studios in architectural schools, particularly ones with the practices of a ‘graduation project’, follow such a trend as well, especially as an increasing number of schools now tend to define the graduation project as the required study for a master’s degree.

This paper, however, aims to approach the design and research pair from another end; the question here is how design studios engage with research at the undergraduate level. The paper will attempt to discuss the practices of research predominantly at the level of earlier design studios of the first couple of years, where any act of both design and research is outlined through purposes of pedagogical cultivation rather than manifest goals aligning with the production of new and original knowledge. One can observe that such discussion is not as common as the broad literature cited above. Research, in design studios at the undergraduate level, is hardly subject to critical questioning but rather regarded as something that exists inherently. The EAAE Charter on Architectural Research, for instance, defines not only the architectural school as a whole but especially the design studio in particular as a “place for research practice par excellence”, where students are trained to “establish basic premises, perform critical analysis, conduct intensive research and propose syntheses independently (EAAE, 2012).” Donald L.

Bates problematizes this very account regarding research as a natural component of the undergraduate studio, especially on the ground that now it is a rather indispensable practice of graduate design. In his argument, this casual assumption that regards design studios as necessarily part of a research culture, especially in light of the conflicting allegiance with the profession and its required competencies, is already a problematic expectation (Bates, 2015, 101-102).

The means and ends that research practices emerge at the undergraduate studio in its most usual and conventional way are also open to critical questioning. Most conventionally, and especially in the earlier studios up to the senior level, research appears in the form of 'case studies' or 'precedent analysis', where the semester's studies begin with the analysis of assigned cases that are somewhat relevant to the semester's project. The case study is regarded as an initiator, coinciding with the earlier stages of a design project, i.e., before the "real work of designing begins" (Lawrence, 2015). Its efficiency is reduced to solely establishing a ground or a context for the possible future design propositions, which should not continue to exist once the real design phase starts. As was also problematized by Bates, research as; "interrogative, iterative working through of a specific line of inquiry in pursuit of testable design qualities and architectural effects throughout the duration of a project are seldom enacted (Bates, 2015, 102)." This common perception translates as a long-standing pedagogical split in architectural education between design studio production and advanced intellectual production, which is to be acquired either in history and theory courses of the curriculum or in research at the graduate level; Ph.D. by design, as discussed above.

Such critique of research practices in the undergraduate design studio reveals that, although the recent development of the idea of 'design research' facilitated an enhanced legitimization where the design product could be defined as research, it did not similarly ease the way that practices of undergraduate research could actually be

defined as "real work of designing." Anyone involved in the design studio would acknowledge that design practices seldom develop *ex novo*, but almost always are based on an existing body of knowledge (as students are constantly told that they do not need to discover the Americas again). Yet, the relationship of the studio with research and particularly with research on what has been done before, is rather an uneasy one, as there has always been a disciplinary anxiety with the act of making manifest references to the design work of others' in the design process. Lawrence places the source of this anxiety in fear of losing the most prioritized quality assigned to the artifact, which is accustomed to being defined as 'originality' (Lawrence, 2015)<sup>2</sup>. The value attained to the architectural artifact can seldom be thought independent of its distinctive and peculiar qualities, which is, on another level, intrinsically related to the idea of creativity. Being influenced by another work or making particular references to others' work can hardly be part of the valuing process as it is destined to fall outside the territory of personal creativity. Lawrence's approach regards this as the crisis of modern architecture (Lawrence, 2015).

The discussion on the concepts of originality and influence on accounts of modern architecture and modern architectural historiography well exceeds the scope of this paper; nonetheless, the notion of 'anxiety' attributed to the architectural discipline above resonates with the primary set of observations carried out by the authors of this paper, which bases the central problem definition on originality. The widespread myth on architectural thinking and production, which claims that the design process begins in the creative mind of the architect, where original design ideas materialize out of thin air and end up in the architectural design as a unique work of art, has been observed to be strong with our new-coming students. It is not only that the freshmen students in architectural schools usually arrive there with an inferior mid-level education in the knowledge of design, but the professional community of architects all

around the world also feeds the myth as a part of their social agenda regarding their professional claims (Sarfatti-Larson, 1983). Not the successful ones, but students with mid to low success levels, who experience difficulty adapting their studies in the methodology of design thinking, reveal that what gets in their way can usually be the disciplinary ‘anxiety’ of original creation. Such students tend to misplace their search for originality not in the overall character of the product but in an ‘initial idea’, which is expected to shape the design in a unique and creative way right from the beginning. They understand that the design process involves some means of research, but they try to operate ‘the research’ only after the creative design idea has been ‘found’ and only to devise the practical agency that would assist the realization of the idea.

## **2. The studio exercise: Initial premises**

In order to address such repeating problems, the authors of this paper undertook to design a semester-long studio task that was built on the practices of referring and on multiple systems of reference, which was intended as a deviation from the overrated search for originality. The task was presented to the studio as an integral undertaking of design and research, which in the end aimed to shift the emphasis from qualities of the product that pertain originality or lack of it to aspects of design methodology where diverse and varied means of making manifest references are positively internalized. Actually, the discussion on possible grounds of defining originality and alternative methods of referring in design is not new, as can also be found in an issue of *Perspecta* titled “Quote,” which was devoted to the discussion of influence and reference in architectural research. (49, 2016) Most articles in the issue share a consensus that even though architectural production prizes originality, quotations, and associated operations, rather than being gestures to disciplinary anxiety, are vital as the most potent tools of cultural production (Artemel & LeSturgeon & De la Selle, 2016). Even though these discussions open new perspectives

on the discussion of the subject, they mostly remain on a theoretical level rather than tested practically.

Before going into the details of this studio experience, it will be helpful to mention certain particular and intentional reservations for the sake of clarity in framing the discussion. One central assent was that possible references to specific connotations of the term ‘design research’ or ‘research by/for/on/through design’ were considered secondary for the studio exercise, if not completely irrelevant. The studio discussions were carefully steered at a safe distance to such discussions for the sake of clarity regarding the distinct contrasting qualities that emerge within the graduate and undergraduate levels of design research, as discussed earlier.

The concept of ‘precedents’, and chiefly what the discussion that Colin Rowe and his colleagues established in the late 70s on the concept, can entail a second path of working, which the studio instructors chose to avoid deliberately for this exercise. Emerged as an outcome of the controversial approach that he developed towards modernism, the ‘historical precedent’ in Rowe’s argument was utilized as a source of formal invention, implying an emphasis on the idea of composition that is oftentimes regarded as an act of bricolage (Ockman, 1998, 450). It is true that Rowe utilized the term to discuss numerous issues that should not be reduced to a discussion on architectural composition; however, it was consciously excluded from the studio exercise that is presented in this paper because it would present the students with a specific way of looking at the historical work, where formal attributes of a building tend to dominate other possible references one can make to the historical work of architecture.

There are also particular contemporary examples in other architecture schools where the study of historical precedent was utilized as a basis for a more sophisticated analysis of the existing work rather than a cursory cut-and-paste. However, this is still believed to impede the questioning of the research process that the students were expected to contribute to the studio<sup>3</sup>.

One studio exercise should also be mentioned here as having quite similar intentions to our case, where the problem was defined around the ways and which the content of history courses be taught and discussed within the design studio courses (Weddle, 2010, 753). In the studio conducted by Weddle, analysis of the historical precedent was regarded in its potential to act as a catalyst for a critical and interpretative design act, which may suppress any barriers between design knowledge and historical knowledge (Weddle, 2010). Although both studio works seem to dwell on common stresses at first glance, in the exercise subject to this article, the intention was not limited to a quest for historical knowledge and how it can be utilized to develop a critical position for architectural design, as stated before, but rather a further quest on how one can refer and organize multiple references.

Yet, a bolder distinction that was aimed to be at work with this work in comparison to works that emphasize the concept of the precedent was that, unlike the latter, the exercise was meant to prioritize a process-oriented study against a product-oriented one. The studio work aimed to implement a variety of exercises, as going to be detailed below, with the goal that students would research into an understanding of multiple references, including the multiplicity of references that the selected references include. In this system of inquiry, the references are based on something other than how the end product of the design process would end up referring to other architectural artifacts, but on how one architect individual would end up referring to others. In that respect, the primary expected product of the whole research process should neither be novel architectural knowledge (as in the design research within a Ph.D. study) nor a new architectural artifact (as in the usual goal of a precedent-oriented design study); but the student herself, as the architect in the process of making. In other words, research was defined as a process that builds up the means that the future architect communicates with the existing design culture and eventually builds up a new subjective

position within it. This method of thinking historically is believed to be an essential precondition for operating a disciplinary consciousness and knowledge in design practices, where architectural knowledge would support not a second-rate copy-paste or a shallow understanding of history but a personal awareness in utilizing this knowledge (Miljački, 2011).

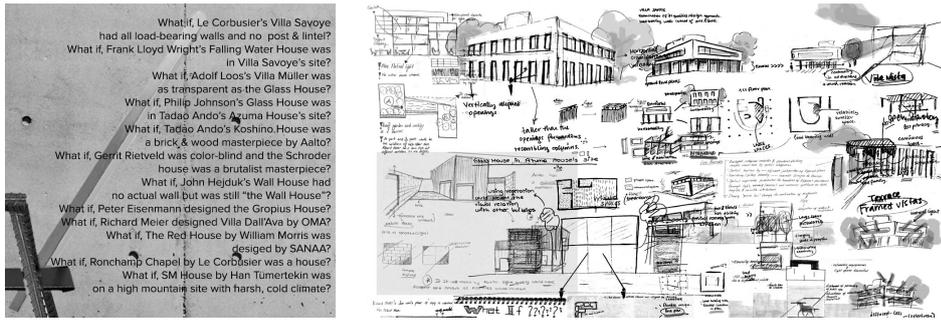
### 3. The studio exercise: Design problems defined as research problems

“History teaches about the past, not in order to suggest formal solutions for the future but to make sense of the present (Keyvanian, 2011, 35)<sup>4</sup>”

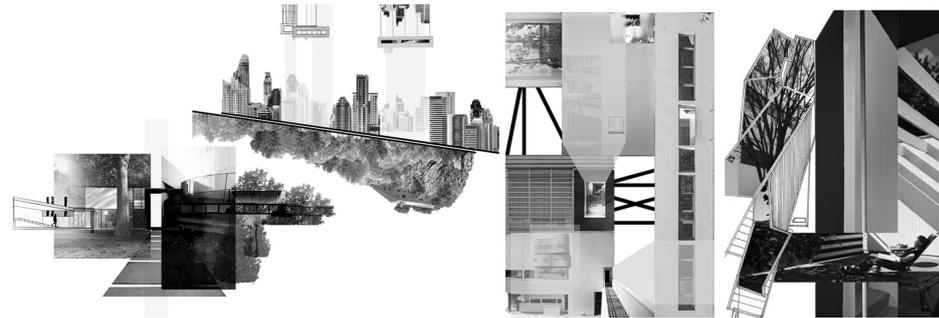
“...in other words, what would Hendrix sound like playing Bartok? (Covach & Boone, 1998)<sup>5</sup>”

The research methodology was introduced as a prelude to raising awareness of students’ approach to the processes of design and research not as two distinct practices that influence each other but to highlight the nature of their immanent mutual relations from the very beginning. Therefore the major exercise was formulated to include research problems that were defined as design problems, as well as design problems that were defined through research problems. The semester focused on a single design task, “to design a house”, rather than introducing multiple design projects; however, there were a few initial exercises introduced in the form of sketch problems to warm up the students to the expectations of research methodology. These exercises also aimed to initiate research on research methodologies by questioning the possible variety in examining, responding, and referring to the existing body of architectural works. The idea in all was to eliminate the differentiation as it has often been assumed (either by students or by instructors) where research is considered as a rather objective act and design is taken as a somewhat subjective one.

The practical reflections of such aspects of the design of the studio exercise started by informing the students at the beginning of the semester that they would be studying the design of a house and were asked to start building up a collective annotated bibliography



**Figure 1.** Examples from student work on the sketch problem defined in a series of “What if” conditions (TED University, Department of Architecture Archive).



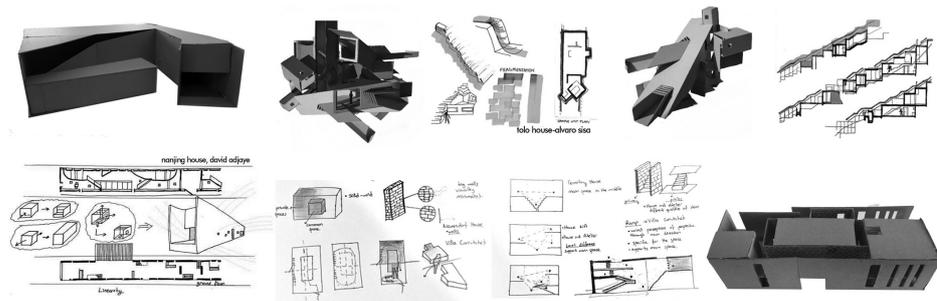
**Figure 2.** Examples from collage work for case study houses (TED University, Department of Architecture Archive).

on the subject, which they actually kept adding to and sharing through course’s online Moodle page throughout the semester. This method was one of the initial attempts to overturn the conventional compartmentalization of the studio as analyses phase and project phase. The annotated bibliography ensured the continuity of the research activities throughout the semester. In the second stage, the students were given a number of ‘what if’ questions that expected highly personalized design interpretations as answers but were only possible to process by conducting well-informed research on the given cases and serious analytical reasoning.

The questions, which can be followed in Figure 1, were not composed to make sense in the historiographic sense but to provoke an ingenious answer. Yet, the ingenuity was not expected to be exhibited via creative and original answers but by sound, analytical research and a good understanding of the cases. One implicit assertion in the assignment was that the act of design, including any notion of creative action, began before research and not after it: by composing good research questions, one may include a very subjective

opinion on what should be known. The question “What if Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye had all load-bearing walls and no post & lintel?” for instance, asks how one can take out the essential component in Villa Savoye while being able to claim that it is still Villa Savoye nevertheless. That will require a mature understanding of the ‘five principles’ and a design proposal to introduce a new take on them.

In another initial exercise, as shown in Figure 2, the students were given a larger group of house projects. They were asked to produce collages built upon their research of a series of cases accompanied by a couple of semi-random ‘phrases’, defined as spatial initiators. The case list was built to include as diverse examples as possible in terms of time, location, approach, etc., while all cases were picked so that none is particularly difficult to learn much about with quick research. On the other hand, the spatial initiator phrases were intentionally composed as very loose statements, all of which were generated randomly. Some of them can be listed here; “unfolded surface, spatial silence, assembled light, hiking verticality, leaking from edges, undecided..



**Figure 3.** Examples from sketch problem defined as; ‘make a quote’ (TED University, Department of Architecture Archive).

etc”. The case study list included several single dwelling/house projects, among which the students selected and coupled with the initiating phases to formulate their collage work. This week-long exercise required the students to shift accustomed terminologies of dis-

ussing case studies in design studios. It also aimed to introduce alternative research methods, where personal interpretation of research findings was required to be prioritized above an accustomed objective case study research that is freed from the personal endeavor. All intended to function as initiators for flexible and open interpretation to structure the collages upon, a method which was picked again to facilitate such flexible and interpretative take on presenting research findings.

In the next assignment, the students were asked to produce a diagrammatic model, but this time with a ‘quote’ from a case study of their own choice, as shown in figure 3. The study of the quote proved to be extremely helpful in generating good discussion in the studio by combining the research on others’ design work with the act of design with a series of thought-provoking questions: where and how does a quote begin or end in architecture; what makes a ‘citation’ a ‘quotation’ (set aside a good one); can one underquote or over-quote (as in: “As Abraham Lincoln once said, good afternoon”); what other forms are possible, if a specific reference is not a quote (such as translation, sample, cover, variation). All three preliminary exercises were regarded as initiating exercises that try to break the routines of research and presentation of research, especially in the first weeks of the design studio. They were finalized very quickly but were

discussed at length in the studio, mostly pondering the fundamental question of the semester: “How do we look at others’ design work, and what do we do with what we see to make something of our own out of them?” Therefore, all these relatively small exercises tried to trigger the initial discussion, which is expected to get more profound with the introduction of the final project, as to how one can develop the capability to position oneself and critically respond to the existing knowledge of architecture.

Before arriving at the final assignment, all the discussions tried to open up a different research methodology in studio processes, where the design process as a whole can have dynamic and rather not specific inner relations with research. In this scenario, what is named as research needs to be redefined constantly because, in reality, not only design but also research includes subjective decisions and choices. The relationship between the two is always an issue that needs to be reframed for each and every condition anew. So starting with the initial exercises, all the discussions tried to dwell on how research makes references to other existing bodies of research, how one selects the sets of references to be included (and therefore multiple other sets to be excluded) and picks among the wide variety of ways and means of ‘referring’ that can be manifested in the end as design decisions. As Hill also points out, “... one of the key things about research is that you have to be able to situate your own work in a wider context. It is not just about doing it (Hill, 2015, 116).” Before the final assignment, it was more evident for students that the expectation of the studio was a design

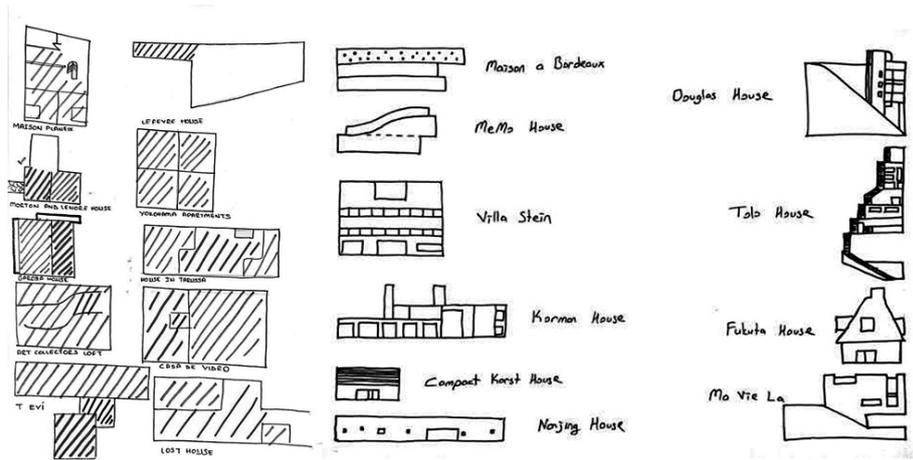


Figure 4. Case study analysis & sketches (TED University, Department of Architecture Archive).

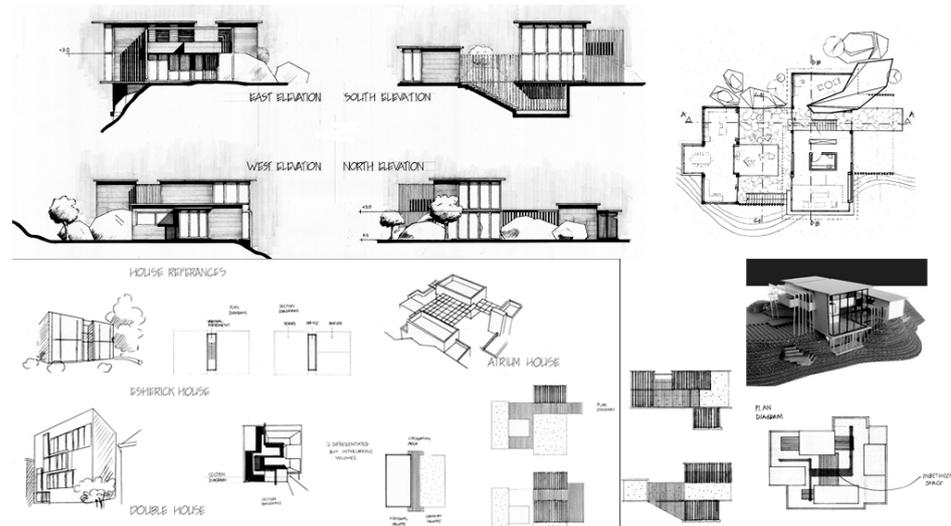
experience in which the design process is not a set of design decisions in response to a design problem but is a set of references to other designers, who have processed similar design problems.

The final project was assigned after the initial exercises, and it required students to start drafting their design proposals for a 'house,' but only 'in reference.' The students were not given any specific scenario or a specific site, as they were not expected to develop their design ideas with initial responses to given contextual issues. But instead, they were asked to draft a proposal that would be defined in reference to other house designs and could be verbalized with, and only with, variations of referring expressions. They were especially expected to consider the distinctions presented by such variations, such as 'to quote,' 'to translate,' 'to adopt,' 'to sample,' etc., as their own take on such variations would be a significant component of their design decisions. In the studio discussions, it was not the real issue if a particular reference was rightfully 'a translation or 'an adaptation,' but it was essential to challenge the student to explain why they see it that way rather than the other.

In order to subvert the linear and more accustomed processes of designing, issues related to the problem of context, like the site, users, or the scenario, were introduced to students gradually and not right at the beginning. That also aimed to sustain active involvement with research through-

out the semester because every new input required a shuffling or fluctuation of many design decisions that were already set. While the initial input introduced a series of generic sites, which students select randomly and start working on, a few weeks later, they were all given additional random qualities for their generic sites. Propositions were raised again as 'what if' conditions, like; "what if your site was located in an urban context, neighboring a park, a road, and a semi-detached house on each of its sides, and in a cold climate". The introduction of new input required the revision of the existing design proposals –if not to return to the very beginning of the process- and the association of design and research got reactivated again because each student had to deal with a new set of problems, and therefore has to redefine the research criteria again, to be responded with design decisions, which were all produced only in reference.

Another significant advantage of this method was the contextual diversity achieved through the random combinations of different sets of site information, which is vital, especially in overcrowded studios. (Figure 4 presents a contextual quest for various projects) Specifications on-site and the scenario were only discussed in their relevance to the design ideas and approaches proposed. The critiques went on with the emphasis on 'referring' as design acts for most of the semester, and only after the second pre-jury were they asked to finalize their design



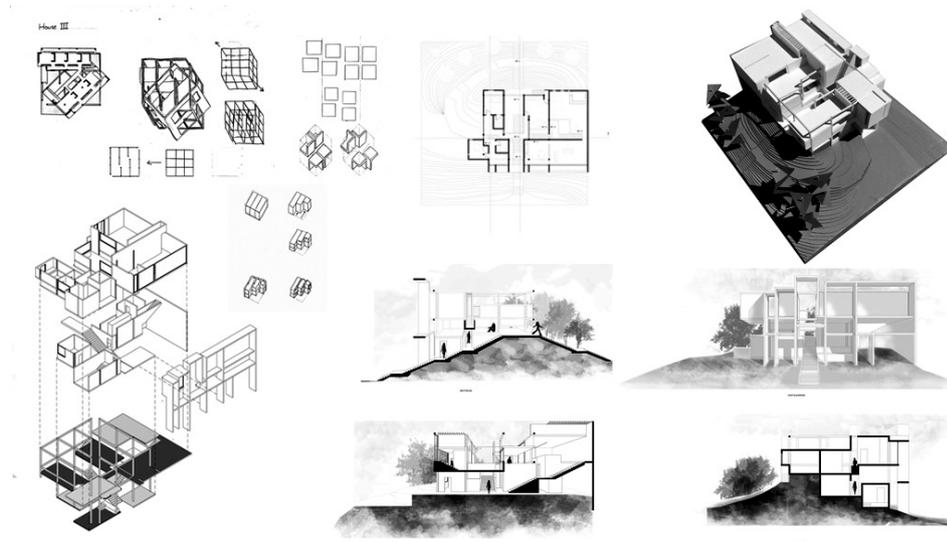
**Figure 5.** Final presentation of a student work (TED University, Department of Architecture Archive).

by articulating all aspects of the architectural proposal in a coherent design approach (which must have matured by then in reference) without the direct discussion on references. The final product to be presented in the final jury was expected to be a well-crafted design proposal for a single dwelling, though the design process did not follow conventional methods.

Architectural students in their second year are, by all means, still relatively novice within the discipline. So, they may come up with successful design proposals, but that does not guarantee their being conscious of why and how they have achieved it. Similarly, their understanding of research can easily result in form-oriented research, concluding an insensible copy-pastes or products of formal resemblance. Therefore, rather than repeating accustomed discussions on plagiarism, in most studio critics, the emphasis was put on the development of an individual search for understanding and testing the qualities of each design process with respect to the others' work. In a way, the studio constantly argued the students' ability to 'refer to' and 'translate' or even 'adopt' what is already written, projected, drawn, or built. All such design acts (to refer, to quote, to translate, to sample, etc.) were given to the students as a list from the very beginning in the studio and they all accommodate different levels of appropriations, which is often not a very easy

task to differentiate. Yet all in all, they triggered intellectual discussions because even choosing among the verbs necessitated an acknowledgment on students' behalf; an acknowledgment that brings out not a formal categorization or labeling but a critical position that justify diversity and prevalence of scholar knowledge.

In the final presentations of the projects, there was a common intention for a particular emphasis on the lucid display of how the project referred to, translated from, or adapted specific key approaches within particular projects. The referencing system has been integrated into the overall presentation of each project, rather than standing apart, as it constituted the foundation for the discussion of the projects. In the case of this project in figure 5, the main discussion revolved around how a central architectural element like a staircase can be used not only to partition but to define the architectural space in all dimensions. The very orthogonal, monolithic, and central organization of the staircase in Escheric House by Louis Kahn clashed with the light and more dynamic articulation of architectural space in Double House, where the staircase enables the possibility of interlocking spaces. Specific representation techniques that are associated with certain architects, like, for example, the specific grid as quoted from Eisenman and its exploded axonometric representation, were acknowledged



**Figure 6.** Final presentation of a student work (TED University, Department of Architecture Archive).

as an indispensable gesture to his declaration that “drawing (to me) is a form of writing and a form of reading what I write (Eisenman, 2013).” In this particular project displayed in figure 6, Eisenman’s fragmented grid was reintroduced to discover the possibilities of a rhythmic formation in controlling the overall spatial configuration. The progression of the grid was a method of drawing as well as design, similar to how Eisenman utilizes the grid. The research context of the project, therefore, required an understanding of how Eisenman connects architectural drawing to architectural design in order to reinterpret his strategy but also to exploit how the introduction of the fragmented grid can be a strategy to arrive at a different interpretation of what Eisenman calls as; ‘notational systems.’

The example projects mentioned above can be regarded as random examples that showed how the discussion on a certain project and its evaluation was conducted within the studio. Of course, the examples can be multiplied, yet the intention of this paper is not to present an all-encompassing account of the outcomes of this design studio process and how each student project responded to the required research component of the problem but rather to problematize the accustomed design and research interaction within the design studio.

#### 4. Conclusion

Although they sound intriguing as practices of a design studio, all of those acts detailed above that guide the research process in the given studio exercise are familiar concepts, especially for the production of artwork. Many of them are conventional practices within branches of artistic production, such as ‘adaptation’ in cinema, ‘sample’ in music, or ‘translation’ in literature. Architecture’s relation to these concepts is also not exactly a new topic. The discussion on translation, for example, has never been foreign to architectural design and practice: Architecture, by nature, is mainly about converting specific ideas produced in one medium to another; as in from drawing to building (Evans, 1997)<sup>6</sup>. The medium of production for architecture is first by drawing, and later the ideas in the drawing get translated into the built form. There is also a comprehensive literature that analyses this multi-layered and, at times, ambiguous course of this process, mainly because translation processes cannot simply be defined as the act of conveyance without much alteration. In such a case, one can talk about a level of royalty to the original document. However, royalty or fidelity in other stances works differently. As also elaborated by Akcan, “mistranslation is an oxymoron in architecture (Akcan, 2012)”<sup>7</sup>. Because in the visual medium, as in architecture, the fidelity to the

original is always open to manipulation and distortion, therefore its relation with the original is very different from what we are accustomed to in other non-visual fields, like in linguistics, for example<sup>8</sup>.

The way the projects refer to or translate from other architectural works, therefore, does not enforce a discussion that is limited to its relation to the original work but the interpretation of the author, in this case, the student, and his/her level of awareness to the existing discussion. The ground for evaluating students' work in this case, therefore, should rest heavily on the communicability of the whole process, the unfolding of a series of reasoning, and each student's individual contribution rather than the simple comparison in the level of fidelity to the original. Again, as stated before, in this approach, the end product should fall behind the design process, and the evaluation should exceed what is seen to be replaced by what is understood, which also requires a conversation on an intellectual level for both parties. The studio exercise stepped out as an experience where judging the quality of the thing that meets the eye should be replaced with an intellectual perception and discussion. The knowledge of architectural history provided an advantage for reflective thinking, yet the studio tried to stretch the limits of the discussion to a broader intellectual position for each student rather than restraining the assessment inside a historical framework.

The documented results of the studio exercise, in the form of grades statistics, instructors' written reports and the oral evaluation and discussion by the guest jury members, as well as the oral commentary brought in by the students in the colloquium after the jury tend to agree to affirm the significant argument above. The relative success or failure of each student that presented their work in the final jury, especially in comparison to other semesters, where rather conventional design studies were exercised, was not manifest in the projects that were presented as design products but in the intellectual and disciplinary communication performed by the student in the

act of presentation and design discussion. The overall grade average in the final jury and the number of projects that were graded to be successful or not did not significantly alter compared to other semesters. It is also quite difficult (and was also difficult during the jury) to evaluate what the method tested in this exercise has distinctively contributed to the products, which other methods would theoretically not be able to, just by looking at the visual presentations. However, it was the major observation of the instructors and jury members that students, especially those with successful results, performed significantly better oral presentations and much more confident, skillful, and intellectually broader discussions in comparison. All these findings seemed to be positive results of the methods applied. In that respect, the instructors concluded that the skills related to disciplinary language, scholarly communication, and performative discussion mainly reflected upon the studio exercise's impact.

It is interesting to find out that such questioning of the concept of originality has also taken place in how the very general concept of 'research' is defined, similarly to be replaced with an emphasis on communication. In the United Kingdom, for instance, the Research Excellence Framework document for 2008 defined research as an "original investigation that was undertaken to gain knowledge and understanding (Fraser, 2013, 1)." However, the definition changed for the document of 2014 to "a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared (Fraser, 2013, 1)." The way that the word 'original' got out and the statement on being 'effectively shared' got in is very much parallel to how the concept of research was approached in this studio exercise; it involves the ultimate and inherent pedagogical message that the quality of being communicable always triumphs over originality, at least in the design studios in architectural schools, if not always in architectural practice. This does not mean to assert that there will never be any new ideas and all one can produce is an old idea in a new form; but is just proposing that design education, especially in the first couple of

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A studio exercise designed to question the concept of originality: An approach to research in architectural education

years, should be about learning the language of design with all the collective set of meanings, norms, and values, more than the novelty of design ideas.

The emphasis on learning the language, not only as an operational tool but as a thing that has evolved through time, is an approach where learning how to position and communicate within that position is more essential than learning how to design. As Saussure once put that, “in language, there are only differences” we argue that one of the best ways a student of architecture can experience how to appropriate a designer’s position when confronting an architectural problem is by investigating how to communicate that position in reference to other positions in similar problems, with all the varieties of referring expressions. In the end, there should be room for any level of originality that one requires, but without the premature formation of ideas on originality being on the way. All in all, the studio project subject to this article was simply about communication, where the student was first assigned to communicate with the existing architectural culture and then to communicate the results of that communication with the instructors and fellow students. The main aim in that was to establish the architectural design process as a thing that is not based on mystified forms of creative action but on rational and communicable forms of research methodology.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Some recent works that discuss the issue of Ph.D. by design include Hauberg, J. (2011), Fraser, M. (2013), Moloney, J. (2015). For a much earlier discussion on the topic, see Patsavos, N. & Inan, D. (2005).

<sup>2</sup> The concept of ‘originality,’ as discussed in the design studio, does not directly relate to the possible discussions on the concept of ‘authenticity,’ which may be regarded as a similar concept; yet attains diverse connotations and theoretical positions. In the words of Benjamin, for example, Authenticity radically differs from the concept of originality as discussed in this paper, as it refers to a value of originality that is

defined not only through the object itself but strictly bounded by the context and the history of the object. However, the discussion on originality in the paper is tried to be analyzed through its close associations with design research and its translation to the architectural artifact. Benjamin, W. (1935).

<sup>3</sup> There are only a few examples that define their educational strategies to question similar concerns in the scope of a design studio with what the authors of this paper try to question practically. Even though the problem definitions of such examples radically differ from the exercise subjected to this article, they can still be listed here as Miljački, A. (2011) “From Model to Mashup A Pedagogical Experiment in Thinking Historically about the Future”; Keyvanian, C. (2011). “Teaching History to Architects”; Goldschmidt, G. (1998) “Creative Architectural Design; Reference versus Precedence.”

<sup>4</sup> “Beyond Precedent” was a recent issue of the Journal of Architectural Education, where a series of articles tried to discuss teaching and engaging with history in architecture and architectural education from different perspectives. The article of Keyvanian, “Teaching History to Architects,” settles on possible methodologies for an operative history (Keyvanian, 2011, 35).

<sup>5</sup> “My interest is in how to take the energy and spirit of Rock music and extend it to the music drawing from my background as part of the European tonal harmonic tradition. In other words, what would Hendrix sound like playing Bartok?” Attributed to Robert Fripp of King Crimson (Covach & Boone, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Robin Evans is one of the prominent figures, who argue this nature of translation in architecture, which is different from other visual arts as the architects never work directly with the object of their thought, but always work at it through some intervening medium, like drawing, modeling, etc. In his words, “recognition of the drawing’s power as a medium turns out, unexpectedly, to be recognition of the drawing’s distinctness from and unlikeness to the thing that is represent-

ed.... (Evans, 1997, 154-156)."

<sup>7</sup> As Akcan states, "the concept of translation in visual mediums works much differently than translation in literature. The transferability of the visual image is different from the translation of any linguistic text because one does not require another language to translate as in literature (Akcan, 2012, 8)."

<sup>8</sup> Another studio exercise from the authors also tests the methods of translation from music to architectural design and commonalities of creative processes in the studio (İmamoğlu, İnan & Uçar, 2013).

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