Reimagining the Design Studio as an Open Conversation. In defense of a collaborative, non-hierarchical and interdisciplinary approach to design pedagogy.

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The learning and teaching dynamics of the traditional design studio, which remains the dominant teaching method for architectural design, derive from the classical master-apprentice model that architecture has followed for centuries, from the Ecole des Beaux Arts to the modern movement and beyond. Although this conventional model has been flexible enough to adapt to very different cultural and historical moments, it is also true that it has failed to fully respond to recent changes such as the fragmentation of the research scopes in the discipline and the growing diversity of the fields it is connected to, ranging from humanities to hard sciences.

This paper presents an alternative way of organizing and delivering the architecture studio as open conversation. The pedagogical method we progressively improved during the teaching experience of several years challenges the duality between master-apprentice model and turns it from a hierarchical and unidirectional transfer of knowledge into a non-hierarchical and collaborative dialogue. Three interrelated aspects of this approach (none of which was given any priority over others but
performed spontaneously) are: Firstly, the presence of multiple instructors in different positions with different approaches naturalizes the diversity of opinions in discussion, and creates an open-ended conversation in which the distinction between student and instructor gets dissolved. Secondly, a loose thematization that allows crossing disciplinary territories with ease, from construction and environmental design to history and theory. Thirdly, an unequivocal openness regarding the actual project’s outcome encourages the coexistence of opposing architectural attitudes and forms of representation which can be called a conversation among architectures.

Lastly, to exemplify the notion of studio as open conversation, this paper concludes with a series of students’ projects produced within this studio environment, and benefited from the openness of its intellectual and creative atmosphere.

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-David Franco holds a PhD and a MArch from the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid. He is currently an Assistant professor at Clemson University School of Architecture. He has previously been Associate Professor on Architectural Design at the Escuela Politécnica Superior Universidad San Pablo CEU Madrid, and Assistant Professor of Architecture at the University of Idaho. His work has been awarded more than 16 prizes on International Architecture competitions such as Europan 6 and 7. He has been nominated for the prestigious Iakov Chernikov prize of contemporary architecture from the ICIF Foundation in Moscow. He has published his work in international magazines, books and peer-reviewed journals, such as A10 A+T VLC Arquitectos Europan Generations, Arkitektur or Bauwelt, among other. His work has been displayed on exhibitions, such as the 10th Venice Biennale, or the 2nd Architecture, Art & Landscape Biennial of the Canary Islands.

-Ulrike Heine is Associate Professor of Architecture since August 2007 and teaches design studio. Her approach on architecture in teaching and research are based on sustainability, in the way of applying simple natural laws in reaction to climatic conditions. She teaches architectural design as a process of integration, which means materials and construction as well as lighting, acoustics and energy saving technologies are creative tools in this process. Her research has a focus on the design, detailing, simulation and evaluation of sustainable structures with a special focus on affordability, adapting to the specific local climatic conditions using passive energy strategies and natural materials.

Ulrike Heine graduated with Diplom Ingenieur [master of science in architecture equivalent] from the Brandenburg Technical University in Cottbus (Germany) in 1999, having also spent a period of her studies at the School of Architecture in Barcelona (Spain). She worked as a practicing architect inter alia for the German architectural practice Hascher Jehle Architektur in Berlin. Prior to coming to Clemson, she spent three
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