Reproduction

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At the heart of almost every facet of architectural production lies its complement and counterpoint: reproduction. To reproduce is to produce again; to copy, to duplicate. Copying has long been part of the architect’s toolkit: Comparing architecture to the study of letters, Leon Battista Alberti wrote that “no one would be satisfied until he had read and examined every author, good and bad, who had written anything on the subject in which he was interested.” Anything of which he “approves,” Alberti goes on to say, the author—or architect—should “adopt and copy.” In the twenty-first century, digital technologies and 3-d printing coupled with a more fully globalized world dominated by image-sharing have made sources easier to find and copies, both virtual and physical, easier to make. Attendant to this explosion of architectural copies have been questions about what constitutes not only impropriety but also foundational disciplinary ideas about originality. Where is the line between an architectural project that alludes to another work versus one that slavishly imitates? If copying and reference have always been a part of architecture—what was the Italian Renaissance, after all, if not a bunch of fifteenth-century “pirates” stealing from ancient Roman architecture—is this really anything new?

Following Rosalind Krauss’ claim that all originality is a “myth,” this year’s Independent Research Studio is grounded within a collective interrogation into all the different ways in which architects borrow, steal, reference and reproduce as a form of creative practice. Working under the premise that all architecture is a form of reproduction, the fall semester will focus on the collection and critical analysis of an extensive catalog of case studies and theories of reproduction in search for emerging patterns and operative strategies. The working thesis is that reproduction is a generative process that pushes the boundaries of architectural expertise through the appropriation of emerging ideas, methods, and media from neighboring fields: from mimetic principles in art history, to legal frameworks around intellectual property, to innovations in digital tools and technologies of imitation. In short, reproduction suggests both an allegiance to the past, as well as an opportunity for design speculation that works through translation.

The fall semester’s research will culminate in a group exhibition at the end of the semester and the production of a physical exhibition catalog. With a particular emphasis on terminology, the contents of the catalog will be loosely structured as a visual dictionary or a working treatise or sorts that charts all the different terms, typologies and media through which we appropriate today in contemporary practice and academic discourse. The document will serve as both an archive of the studio’s output from the fall semester as well as a working manual that provides the foundation for a set of independent projects in the spring. All independent projects should be presented within the overall framework of the studio’s themes, but each project is free to define its own site, program, and thesis argument in conversation with the instructors. Studio work in both semesters will run parallel to a series of guest lectures, panel discussions, and workshops that will provide the intellectual basis for our work.