Inception of Wrongness

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I had never been told I was wrong. Wrong, as in completely incorrect on account of effort, perception, opinion, even methodology.

Enter my first year within the College of Design.

The CORE program introduces beginning design students to the several divisions of design, allowing one to discover which program incorporates their interests best. For many, that discovery was architecture. However, the competition to gain admittance registered on a new, much larger scale. How was I to engage design given this intensified competition? The answer felt obvious: “the professor is always right.”

Competition is the main drive behind students in the year of preparation for application. Professors teach with the hope that students begin to establish a design process. This hope remains, even with the knowledge that true motivation for students often lies in achieving the most popular design. That comparative atmosphere was evident from the start through conversation amongst peers, one-on-one desk critiques and final reviews. Professors and students formed recommendations acknowledging work produced and offered advice for change. Editing a project based upon what the professor thought was best always felt like the only answer. These reviews produced many meaningful conversations, as well as some of the most confusing.

As a first year, I soon became consumed with this idea that if I didn’t carry out the project the “right” way, I would achieve nothing.
I quickly found myself completing iteration after iteration, searching for the moment where my professor would cease all criticism and accept my work as complete. I never did find such a moment. Analysis of those iterations never led me to feel the goal was to achieve a greater understanding of the project. Iterations were completed because the professor said as many iterations as possible was often the best route. With all of this preoccupation with right and wrong, surprisingly, I had never been told that I was right or wrong. The dominant levels of competition drove me to believe that there had to be a right answer. With my acceptance into the program, I assumed that I had found the ‘right’. I had no idea how this mindset would soon change.

The first week in the program was terrifying. To say that we were completely overwhelmed in the language, ideas, and culture linked to architecture was an understatement. Starting a project with little to no guidance became our new routine. Where to begin if the words ‘plan’, ‘section’, and ‘elevation’ had yet to really mean anything to us? How were we to create as prestigious a project as our assigned precedents? Many were quick to re-analyze what about architecture was so attractive in the first place.

The eighty-five of us accepted had been told that we were talented enough to make it into the program. Suddenly, instead of students asking the professors questions, they were the ones asking us. No longer was a question raised without one being raised back instead of an answer. Words like ‘how’, ‘why’, and ‘edit’ shed their old definitions for new ones specific to the major, specific to a developing passion. With this constant state of thinking engaged by both the professors and the students, confusion stepped up once again. This very confusion led to a drawing that would redefine my time as an architecture student so far.

The critique associated with this specific drawing came as a surprise. What I felt was executed accurately was actually extremely inaccurate on many levels. Instead of discovering minor changes, I was hit with a realization much more important than I could have foreseen. Unexpected, harsh criticism allowed me to discover that the critiques I had received up to that moment, including the entirety of my first year, were pointless. The feedback was pointless not because of the content, but because I had never actually taken the time to apply such recommendations. I would always
listen, however that was as far as a critique traveled into my brain. Why had I allowed comments that held so much value become completely empty? I knew that the tendency to mentally stop criticism from making a difference in my project stemmed from the success experienced freshmen year. Realizing the habit I had formed, I decided to change my ways starting that moment. I began to apply recommendations, realizing the many directions I had never allowed to surface. Removing the glaze of contentment I had surrounded my work with was one of the most liberating moments I have experienced to date.

With such forward experimentation, confusion came easier than ever. My professor would state, “Oh, you’re confused? Good,” instead of the usual re-examination and recommendation. I had wound up a part of this ‘inception of wrongness’, and I actually liked it. I had discovered that the time I had spent believing in the rights and wrongs was not wasted, but natural. Gravitation towards feeling right or wrong is typical within the highly competitive atmosphere of the first year of design. The competition carries over into those first months in the program where classmates, no longer opponents, still continue to guard their ideas.

**THERE COMES A POINT WHERE IDEAS, SPECIFIC TO A PERSON, ARE NO LONGER IMPORTANT**

There comes a point where ideas, specific to a person, are no longer important. Architecture students are some of the most analytical students on campus. We think, but we know that our own ideas are not always most beneficial to ourselves. Offering up our own ideas to classmates can provide some of the greatest release found as a student. Accepting others’ ideas and seeing how an individual can develop them is something I wished would have been communicated within that first year of design. I’ve found that a studio, which consistently bounces and accepts ideas off of one another, is often one of the most satisfied.

While rights and wrongs do exist in many instances of life, architecture is seldom one of them. Once in a while, the seemingly most absurd path to take towards a design leads one to the most successful result. Ultimately, there is no answer of right or wrong, only moments of content and discontent.