START OVER

The main hurdle to overcome in studio work is the process of re-working.

Students told to start over perceive that their work is so flawed that it cannot be corrected by patching here and there; a total re-make is necessary.

Teachers not wishing to traumatize their students prefer to make suggestions for changes "here and there," and they regard the student's dominant idea respectfully, as their "intellectual property."

1. The "big idea" that has structured the students procedure often is not completely responsible for the errors made along the way, that can be reduced with practice and re-contextualizing.

    a. Nonetheless, the work is thematized as the student learns from the instructor more about "his/her theme," which he advanced from the start with only a limited idea about its success or educational usefulness.

    b. The student's commitment to the big idea becomes more important, whether it succeeds or fails. Simply having a big idea is given a high value, and equated with the student's commitment to larger themes (typically sustainability or community action fills this role).

    c. With so much riding on the big idea, criticisms do not address it, but rather talk about the effectiveness of various ways of carrying it out. Respect for the idea is ideological. The idea is regarded as an un-debatable good.

2. Starting over completely, however, is the most effective way to gain control over the project and see how one's interests can be played out in several ways. It becomes less important to defend a single approach; as a result, defensiveness itself diminishes, and dialog can begin.

    a. There is no longer a defensive relationship to the theme, or any theme, so the multiple results of architecture can be better seen in relation to each other.

    b. The idea of success, before tied to the development of the main theme, is now more tied to the process, and the necessity to start from scratch; to continually shift positions.

    c. Confidence grows through this process once it is perceived that, no matter how many false starts, a theme *is emerging* that is not a simple, easily recognized, commendable good.

3. The resistance to start over is mostly based on the idea that a large amount of previous effort has been wasted, and that the extremely limited time available for studio work has been squandered. The cause is assigned to a capricious instructor; revenge is imagined and sometimes sought.

    a. The instructor is responsible for not allowing the first "sequences" to develop to such a length that the student perceives that "the idea is working out well" and that, with a little tweaking, it will become a successful project.

    b. Short sequences should be designed for the initial stages of the studio where discussions can intensify the awareness of the dominance of ideas and the paralysis they sometimes impose, with the accompanying personal investments and fear of criticism.

c. The dichotomy of "like/dislike" is a destructive force; it should be replaced by a dialectic disconnected from personal investment … which is to say that a new dynamic must be introduced that does not frame work as the expression of a big idea. At each stage, the "results" must be re-framed as a "basis-cause" and new work begun on the fresh grounds of this re-framing.

   i. The perceived alternative to like/dislike is relativism; one's likes or dislikes are neutralized as personality functions. One opinion is seen as good as any other. The theory creates its own proof, but is fatal for critical development.

   ii. If like/dislike structuring is not brought into the new commitment to the "start over" protocol, it threatens to subvert it at any point. One strategy is to neutralize like/dislike by enlarging its role. Randomness, fragmentation, use of meaningless components, etc. can be shown to have some value although they "do not belong to anyone."

   iii. The issue of ownership has to be transmuted into the condition whereby the architect is compared to the actor or writer, who meets the audience halfway, allowing the audience to actively participate. The communications model that demands that the audience "get my idea" needs to be specifically debunked. In the context of like/dislike, it blackmails the studio process and converts into process of valorization for the perceived native genius of the student.

4. The initiation of the "start over" process should be formalized and its costs made apparent. Even though the student may begin to initiate start-overs, there needs to be an accounting procedure that places more value on the process than the final results.

   a. More value should be placed on process than final results, in understanding how some good ideas had to be "thrown away" in order to appear, later, in contexts where they would be more useful and instructive.

   b. Final completion should be seen as a process that can occur at any point, at several levels that can be effective even with minimal physical product.

      i. Practice "final reviews" with extreme minimal "evidence." Stage short projects with high expectations for final presentations.

      ii. Introduce techniques that make a lot out of a little: enlarging small drawings; collage; emphasis on process rather than material product; presentation focus on process; "complete set of drawings" mentality that includes site planning, lighting, water management, financing, etc. for very fast turn-arounds.

      iii. The start-over should be the central formal component of studio pedagogy. It should be discussed daily, diversified by methods (turning over the paper; tearing things in two; switching desks, etc.) that diminish the threat and enhance the play aspects.

5. The "compulsion" to perfect, at the expense of undoing much careful work, is related to the psychiatric disorder of compulsion-obsession. This relation is not metaphor! It artificially induces the clinical condition to convert it into a work method. The topology of obsession should be understood as key to this method, i.e. how to escape from it at the end before it destroys the project. "Closure" is a broad artistic problem and strategies from all art fields can be used as sources.