Today more than ever, useless information — images, slogans, and memes — saturates our conscious mind. Like white noise, an unintelligible veil disrupts our ability to engage genuinely with useful information when it is presented directly. Abstract forms in our surroundings (buildings devoid of organized information content) further exacerbate this condition by intensifying or concentrating the barrage of useless information. This experience is unhealthy. An architectural education that is adequate to our psychological needs has to teach students about the levels and types of structured information that buildings can present.

Contemporary educational imperatives for unencumbered creativity are based upon a curious misunderstanding, and a lack of real scientific data. It is illogical to expect students to design before they understand human perception and socio-geometric patterns. Creative thinking in and of itself does not lead to good architecture. Only after students have a firm grasp of the cause and effect of material structures can they begin to effectively test and apply their knowledge in hands-on design. In the study of other professional and/or scientific-based disciplines — medicine, law, engineering, mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology — an operating knowledge of that discipline’s processes, principles, and procedures is taught first before any theoretical enquiry takes place. Serious learning begins when students have acquired a solid understanding of the evidence-based knowledge for their discipline.

Free to imagine anything at will, with no obligation to address the responsive dimensions of design, architecture students are thus drawn toward endless speculation. Without any evidence-based criterion to guide their explorations, many give in to the temptation and henceforth work to conceive the most unnatural structures imaginable. After students have been mesmerized by this new abstract world, they begin their studies in materials, methods, and structures. At this point, students who have not successfully adapted to the abstract design method have
typically withdrawn from the school. Those who remain have managed to develop a skill-set of artificial creative expressions, and have internalized their intellectual pretext. Seduced by this abstract process, and no longer concerned about real architecture, the remaining students seldom attempt to reconcile what their material classes are teaching them with what they are designing. The gulf between what is real and what is imagined is so great by now that few ever attempt to bridge the distance.

It is only when they graduate and step out into the real world that architecture students begin to emerge from their fantasy-based educational conditioning. For many this proves to be difficult if not impossible, and what follows for them is a career of frustration and misgivings. Architectural offices are full of such persons. Recent graduates find that after their formal training, their artificial habits of abstract creative thinking cannot solve problems of everyday design. Their education has effectively removed, negated, and confused knowledge about the physical world: knowledge that is essential to establish a foundation for architecture authentic to its purpose.

Design that operates through human awareness sponsors a greater sense of wellbeing and a more positive engagement with the world. Design that operates artificially or abstractly, however, provides little more than the appearance of culture. In the course of the twentieth century much of the traditional knowledge that served to structure a truer, more substantive expression of architecture was either forgotten, or else categorically abolished. New scientific knowledge, which could provide a sustainable foundation of human interaction with the natural world, has either been excluded from architecture, or misappropriated in the service of contemporary architects seeking to propagate their personal ideologies.

The emphasis of architectural education on contemporary images tied to electronic media trains students through cognitive feedback processes to produce specifically non-adaptive structures. Students have all but lost their ability to make corporeal value judgments on their own, or to understand how to decipher perceptual and physical stimuli. Architectural training thus, in effect, psychologically conditions future architects to work against their own basic impulses and physiology. Students become co-dependent on image making, which leaves them at the mercy of their professors’ value system. Obscure philosophical writings, dialogue, and discourse only creates in designers a greater dependency on images.

This unbalanced state creates an anxiety in the study and practice of architecture, which manifests itself in design arrogance: an arrogance based on insecurity. Not having been taught how to perceive and judge for themselves what good space is, what good light is, what good materials are, students are left to contend with the designs of the strongest egos. Forgetting how to recognize our innate perceptions — those that instinctively guide us through information content towards what is nourishing to our body and our psyche — allows us to be controlled by the people in power and the dominant paradigm.