

Retrospectives: 1982 RAIC Assembly

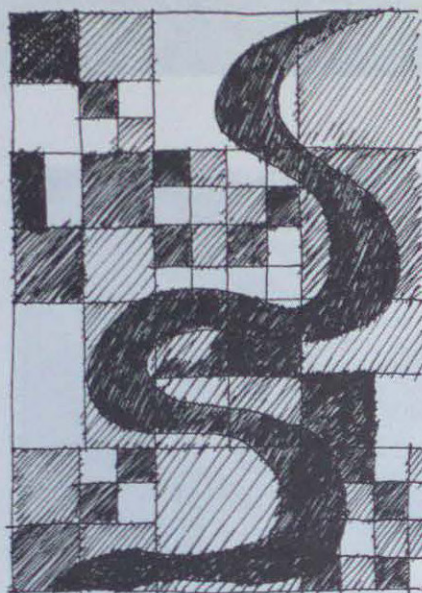
by Brian R. Sinclair

Conferences are usually a time when people can get together and have some fun and exchange information. The Royal Architectural Institute of Canada's Annual Assembly in Winnipeg (May 29-June 2) was indeed an enjoyable social trip for the students attending, but of more importance was the understanding that they took home with them when the conference was over. The conference provided an excellent opportunity for students to get together and talk over issues that were of a common concern. It was reassuring to discover that all the students have similar problems, regardless of the school they attend, and it was interesting to see how students from the different schools approached these problems.

One issue that was of concern was the lack of communication that exists between the schools. This lack of communication results in students not understanding how other schools function, possibly creating a somewhat narrow-minded and opinionated view within any given school. Discussions about the problem brought about suggestions on possible methods of exchange of ideas and works between the schools. It was generally accepted that a good medium for exchange would be an exhibit of the ten Schools' works that would travel between the Schools. This exhibition would increase awareness about what is happening with student architecture in Canada. The display of student work that was assembled for the 1982 RAIC Conference was a well represented sample of the ten Schools work, so it was suggested that it be used as the travelling exhibition. Plans for such an exhibition are now proceeding.

The exchange of student works is a very necessary occurrence, yet students also realized the importance of a more immediate channel to get their ideas out to other students and to the profession. THE FIFTH COLUMN provides such a channel, and students seemed optimistic about this journal. THE FIFTH COLUMN provides the medium through which students can get their ideas out to others, rather than restricting these ideas to the rather narrow audience of their school. The injection of new material into THE FIFTH COLUMN from students across Canada has significant potential, for it is by such exposure that ideas can be tested and criticism voiced. During discussions we realized that there are not enough students utilizing this channel of communication yet one can only hope that this problem arises from a lack of awareness rather than from student apathy. From my observations at these meetings, I believe that students do want to voice their ideas and exchange information. The use of THE FIFTH COLUMN for this purpose must be encouraged.

Communication among students is very important, and during the conference there were many round-table discussions that resulted in many problems being more well understood. The social events were also important as they allowed us to get to know one another without the barriers that seem to exist in more formal meetings. Another instrument of communication, and one that I think is extremely important to students, is the profession's liaison with our student group. My impressions of the student-profession relationship was very positive. This relationship, at the conference, ranged from interaction at meetings to information functions. The student tour of



St. Boniface and Paroisse du Précieux Sang by Etienne Gaboury was a good example of informal communication. I believe I am speaking for all the students involved, in saying that this trip was most interesting and informative. Students can benefit greatly through the experience and involvement of dedicated architects such as Etienne.

The RAIC Student Competition (Rail Car Design) was another issue reviewed at the meetings. It was thought that the submissions were too technical with little creativity involved. Perhaps this technical interpretation was the result of a program which did not promote freedom in thinking, or possibly it was due to the technical aspect of the subject itself. The graphically technical layout of the program booklet may also have contributed to this lack of creative expression. The RAIC Student Competition provides an opportunity for students to get involved with architecture on a national scale. It provides a chance for students to work on a common problem, and through this to learn about and from others. This competition was a first, and as such was open to a myriad of problems. Given the obstacles I must commend Keith Benjamin of the University of Calgary for such a professional job in his organizing the competition. In Keith's discussions with the other students it was decided that what should be presented in upcoming competitions should be a less structured program, perhaps as simple as a one-line statement of the subject. A national competition, although concerned with technical ability, should place as most important the expression of students' creative thought in problem-solving.



The most emotional issue of the conference was the **Washington Chancery** commission award that had recently gone to Arthur Erickson. Students expressed their deep concern on this issue, and at the RAIC General Meeting voiced this concern to the members of the profession. The students were disillusioned with the Government's decision which bypassed the competition selection process. The students felt that the competition process is a fair one, and given the many competent architects in Canada this process was certainly viable. It was stressed that Erickson was once a student of architecture, and as students we are taught that we must work together as a profession, abiding by the rules and conventions of the profession. Arthur Erickson has been an inspiration to students through his architecture, and it is disappointing to see this political event having a negative effect on such feelings. It seemed, and was assuring, that the profession at the assembly was not condemning Erickson as an architect, but was questioning the system that would allow such an obvious lack of fairness to occur.

The **Design Charette** which took place during the conference was a good idea, yet it did not benefit participants as it could have. The architects involved took a very pragmatic approach to the various sites. It seems that this charette (one-half day) was a chance to have a little imagination and show some creative spark. It should be the idea brought forward that is important, yet the entries all seemed to lack imagination - getting tied down instead with details unnecessary in the charette process. For the students the

situation was not that inspiring or educational. For a number of reasons, including the overly commercial approach taken by many of the team leaders, student participation was stifled. I do not think that any student had expected the job allocations that occurred in some of the charettes. What should have happened is student involvement in design decisions, with coordination from the team leaders. I must credit Norman Hoston of Vancouver for giving the students on his team the chance to be involved in the design process. These students were encouraged to explore a variation of the theme - which resulted in an interesting and somewhat comical approach to the site problem. In future charettes I think that all the team participants should work together to come up with designs that approach the problems in new and exciting ways. The charettes are a good idea, and if properly organized and carried out will benefit all those involved. It is the chance to work together and share ideas that makes the RAIC Assembly worth attending.

A very important topic during students' discussions was **RAIC student membership**. The strength of students of architecture in Canada is growing - it seems more and more students are getting involved in both their education and their profession. Through the student membership program of the RAIC, students are benefitting in a number of ways. Students receive an RAIC membership card and certificate, as well as RAIC newsletters, student bulletins, **THE FIFTH COLUMN** Student Journal of Architecture, and free registration in the national competition. More important though, is the communication potential that RAIC

membership provides. Through regional representation, students from the ten Schools of architecture can get information to each other and to the profession. The RAIC respects the students' input, and places the student program high on its list of priorities. The RAIC has given the students a voice on issues through the voting position of Student Councillor, the national president of the RAIC Student Program. The input through the Student Councillor is extremely important, and on behalf of the students of architecture in Canada I must thank Stefan Wisniewski (McGill University) for his time and efforts as Past Student Councillor, and wish the best of luck to Elise Brault (Université de Montréal) in her role as Student Councillor for the coming year.

I must express my satisfaction with the way the student program is progressing. The student meetings went very well, with important communication of ideas and concerns occurring. The student voice at the RAIC General Meeting was impressive, and I am pleased to have seen the interest and encouragement of the profession in student input and interaction. With the continuing growth of participation in the RAIC by students of architecture we can benefit not only ourselves as students but also the profession and the architecture in Canada. The importance of student involvement in the RAIC cannot be underestimated.

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