

# Juries: should they be

By Gary Hasler

*Les jurés sont considérés aujourd'hui essentiels au développement de l'étudiant en architecture; ils sont souvent l'étape finale des projets scolaires. L'essai qui suit questionne les jurés et suggère des améliorations.*

For the average citizen, a jury is something faced by criminals. The word carries with it associations with wrongdoing, trial, and inevitably, guilt. Unfortunately for the architecture student, there is a similarly negative set of associations in the particular version of "jury" he or she is faced with.

An architectural jury is basically a visual and/or oral presentation of a design to a number of jurors who then discuss, criticize, and judge. The purpose, of course, is to provide him or her with constructive feedback to improve their design process. Because architecture is ultimately judged subjectively, this also furnishes a degree of democracy in the hope that several opinions are more reliable or valuable than one.

For the student, the most positive result of such a jury is feedback on the immediate impression given by a design. A student on intimate terms with the design, and conscious of many smaller details, can easily lose sight of the first overall impression it conveys. The jury imprints in the student's mind the reminder to continually step back and take a wider view. This is undoubtedly a constructive result.

However, a jury goes deeper, examining not only the design itself, but the student's decisions and the reasons for them. Has he or she made the right decision in view of the facts, or determined what the facts are, or ignored them entirely? This type of examination is useful in steering the student towards a clearly defined method of decision making, which is valuable since the design process is simply a series of decisions which translates ideas

towards communicating and enhancing the design to an audience, seated many feet away, who will only examine the design for a few minutes. While this attitude towards presentation is not unreasonable, the feedback from re-

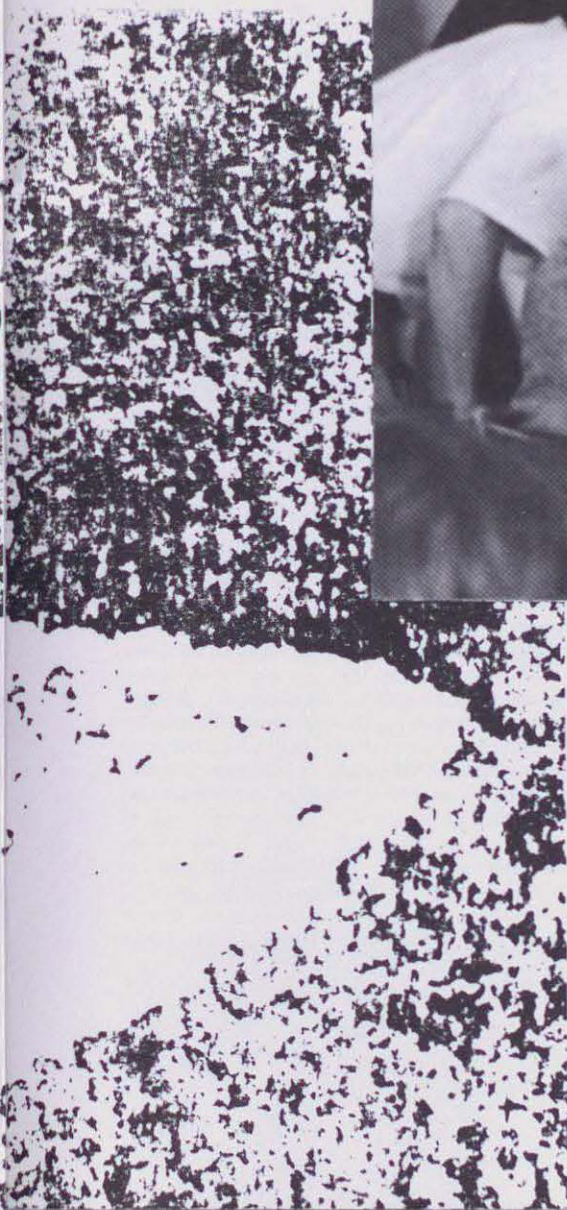


Layout by: Stéphane Rasselet

and requirements into a building.

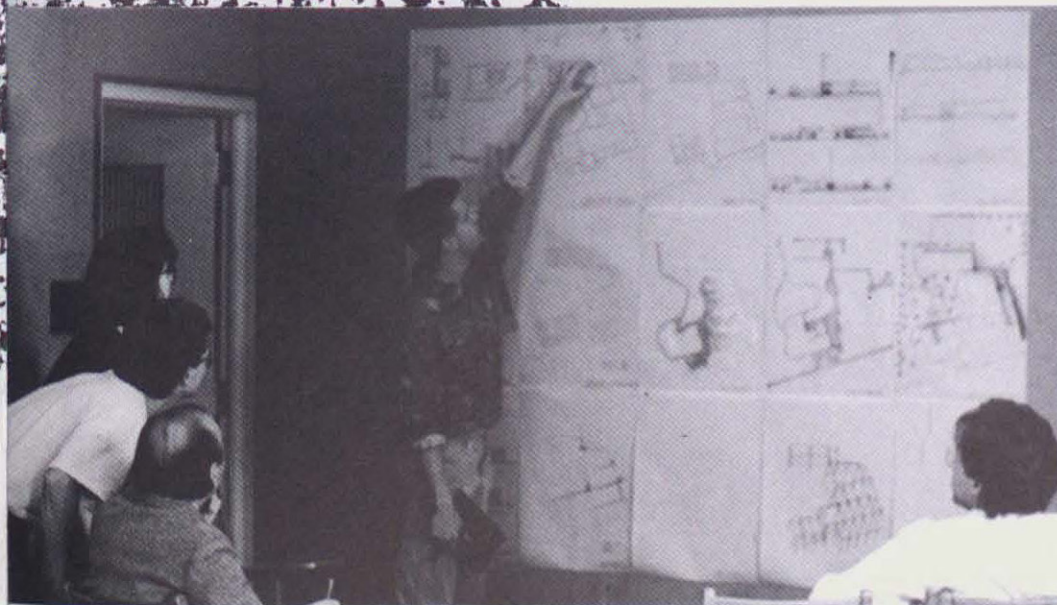
A common problem in the way the architectural jury is used is that it is seen as the climax of the design project. It is almost always the final event in the project schedule, and the presentation is usually geared entirely

peated jury experiences causes a backwash which affects the design process itself. Design decisions begin to be based on the impression they will make on the jury rather than the effect they would have on the supposed inhabitant or client.



A more subtle effect of the jury process, less recognized and more insidious, however, is the psychological attitude that is produced by the constant fear of criticism. In many students, the eventual effect of repeated criticism is a permanent defensive attitude which renders them unable to make proper decisions or any decisions at all. The

## a trial?



student who relies on the studio critic to make decisions for him is somewhat the analog of the habitual criminal who can no longer judge right or wrong, but merely accepts that punishment is inevitable. Indeed, in rationalizing a decision, it becomes obvious that there is no way to be immune to criticism of even the smallest detail. The student sees himself in a no-win situation, resigned to simply enduring the criticism while waiting until his "sentence" has been served: graduation day.

Those who try to work within the jury system, rather than giving up the struggle, find themselves faced with two paths. As in any endeavor, the broad and well-travelled path is the safest: how can anyone criticize what has worked many times before? The other path, that of innovation, leads to interest, discussion, and criticism, but it is the criticism that stings the longest, especially when backed by the threat of a poor grade, and a jury which wanders into a particular line of criticism is often no longer judging the overall design, but a particular detail which may or may not be important to the design's overall success. In a small-scale and very subtle way, a mob mentality settles over the jury, obscuring a coherent overall judgement. One of the ideals of formal education – discussing new ideas – has the unfortunate effect of associating innovation and creative thinking with increased criticism.

These concerns about the jury system do not suggest that juries are intrinsically bad or destructive. The complete abandonment of juries would take away much of the intensity and concern for communication and overall impact which are stronger than in other academic fields. In the student's eyes, the jury symbolizes the reality of a client user, and helps remove architectural education from the realm of the purely academic. Rather, the jury might be improved by somehow overcoming the previously mentioned faults. Students and professors need to be encouraged to regard the jury's response as only part of the assessment of a design's success. The jury itself perhaps, needs a stronger hand guiding the path of its discussion, and above all, the faults of the jury system need to be acknowledged within the system itself.

Most students eventually realize that the lasting value of formal education is in learning to think for themselves. Just as with a work of literature, or a science textbook, an architectural jury should be seen as a tool for the students to use to educate themselves, rather than the "trial by fire" it is seen as now. ■

*Gary Hasler is a first year masters student at the University of Manitoba.*