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The Jury's Out: a Critique of the Design Review in Architectural Education

Abstract
This paper discusses the review process, or jury, as a forum for presenting and assessing student design projects. Information regarding the origin and evolution of the jury is presented alongside contemporary research into prevailing attitudes towards the jury format.

The paper focuses on the jury in architectural education, however it is equally relevant to the teaching of design and fine art, both of which often employ jury or panel assessment processes.

It is established that the jury is, along with the design studio, firmly entrenched at the centre of architectural education, yet is also a major source of student dissatisfaction. It is the accepted means by which student work is assessed, and an essential training ground where students learn presentation techniques that are essential for future careers. The jury is also a forum where healthy debate between students and staff can contribute to the reputation of an architecture school.

Yet many students find the traditional jury format intimidating, humiliating, or even boring, and there is evidence that it is often not conducive to learning. The key to maximising learning potential and student satisfaction is found to be through an increase in student involvement in the jury process. The paper explores a number of variations and alternatives to the accepted jury format that optimise student involvement, but also provide appropriate means by which tutors may assess the work.

Biography
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Before teaching at the University of Canberra, Milton Cameron practised architecture in the public sector in Sydney. His last position was Senior Architect/Urban Designer for the University of Technology's Property Development Unit. Before that he was an architect with the NSW Public Works Department, where he was project architect for a number of pubic buildings, including Katoomba Court House and Kearns Public School, and designed elements of the interior fitout of the Powerhouse Museum, including the main Boardroom and the Boulton and Watt steam engine exhibit.

Other positions included the Heritage Branch of the NSW Department of Planning, and the NSW Department of Housing.

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Introduction

The design review, jury, or 'crit',[1] involves lecturers, tutors and visiting professionals commenting on and assessing students' work in a group environment. The design studio as the learning environment, together with the jury as the means to evaluate students' work, have been entrenched in architectural pedagogy for over a century.

In spite of this, the jury system has rarely been subjected to serious critical analysis.[2] Many architectural schools do not establish clear goals or objectives for design juries, nor specify how to ascertain if these have been met. Jurors and visiting critics, whose knowledge of teaching techniques is often limited to their own learning experiences, rarely receive formal training on how to conduct juries.[3]

The paper begins with a short history of the development of the review process in architectural design education, from its origin at the *Ecole Nationale et Speciale des Beaux-Arts* in Paris in the late nineteenth century, to the influences of that institution on North American architectural schools in the twentieth century.

Drawing upon Kathryn Anthony's 1991 *Design Juries on Trial, the Renaissance of the Design Studio*,[4] students' and tutors' attitudes towards the review process in architectural design education are analysed. From this material a series of alternatives and variations to accepted methodologies are proposed and discussed.

The Design Review

Anthony traced the academic tradition of presenting and justifying one's work in a public context back to eighteenth century Cambridge, where the awarding of a bachelor's degree culminated in a 'mock dispute' between the new bachelors and one of the old bachelors.[5] Originally intended to provide guidance for the student and to nurture learning, this event developed into a forum for ranking students' work according to merit.

'Learning by doing', a process where the design problem took preference over the lecture and became the vehicle by which architecture was taught, was introduced into art and architectural education at the *Ecole Nationale et Speciale des Beaux-Arts* in Paris in the 1890s. A government-supported school, the *Ecole* was divided into two sections: one for architecture and one for painting and sculpture. Its architectural origins can be traced back to the classes given by the Academy established under Louis XIV in 1671.[6]

The focus of student life and activity of the Ecole was the *atelier* (design studio) where *concours* (competitions) were carried out. Most ateliers were run independently by *patrons* (design professors). Patrons were practicing architects, and would visit in the evenings for critiques.[7] The *ateliers* were known for their lively atmosphere, based on traditions of cooperation and rivalry. The newest *nouveau* (junior student) and the most senior *'ancien'* helped each other: the latter would criticise the work of the former, and in return would receive help on major competition submissions. There was group loyalty within the *atelier*, and a sense of competition against other *ateliers*.[8]

Submissions at the Ecole were initially reviewed by design tutors alone, behind closed doors. Students were excluded, and would retrieve their work after the jury had finished. From around the middle of last century, this process developed into an open format, with students and other visitors present.[9]

In 1919 German architect Walter Gropius designed and built the Bauhaus School in Dessau with the design studios as the core of student life. In addition to design studios, the six-storey building contained live-in studios for the students, with baths and a gymnasium in the basement. Thus students were able to sleep, eat, study and exercise within the one building. But while the Bauhaus School entrenched and refined the studio environment and subculture, the teaching methods and jury system employed by Gropius and his associates did not change dramatically from those of the Ecole.[10]

Probably the most important influence of the Bauhaus was that, following its closure in Germany, many of its teachers emigrated to North America where they either established new schools, or reformed existing ones according to Bauhaus principles.[11]

The Ecole had a significant influence on architectural education in North America. At the end of the nineteenth century large numbers of American students were enrolled there, while many American architecture schools emulated the French system. The best features of the Ecole were generally considered to be the division into *ateliers*, the tradition of the older pupils helping the younger, and the teaching of design by practicing architects.[12]

The jury as a means of assessing students' work was introduced to North American architectural education at the beginning of the twentieth century,[13] when educators at institutions such as Colombia, Berkeley and MIT adapted elements of the Ecole system to suit the American university structure. The design studio and the jury system continued to develop, and by the 1930s were established as the core of architectural education in North America.

The most significant change that took place in the design studio since the 1930s was the gradual evolution from closed juries to open juries. Open juries later became something of a status symbol for educational institutions, a means by which prospective students could sit in on a critique and form an opinion on the intellectual rigour of a particular school.[14] A downside of this, however, was the perception by some that the jury became a 'blood sport', with students being humiliated and publicly embarrassed as their work was torn to shreds by jurors.

Contemporary research has shown a lack of established goals as being a principle reason for student dissatisfaction with design juries.[15] Surveys also revealed that many students believed they had learned less from criticism in the final jury than from interim, informal discussions with their tutors.[16]

Some believed juries to be an intimidating ordeal, leaving them embarrassed and humiliated, as though they had been 'undressed in public'[17]. Others found reviews 'endless and boring'. English architectural writer Martin Pawley recalled how, at one of his fourth-year crits at the Architectural Association (AA) in London, a school well-known for its intensive and vigorous crit sessions, 'a student collapsed whilst his project was being energetically ridiculed by a visiting critic. The critic did not notice this event until a dreadful silence caused him to turn around moments later'. He also claimed that 'at Oxford girl students had sometimes locked themselves in the lavatories', while 'at the Beaux-Arts some students had committed suicide.'[18]

But the jury process can be equally trying for jurors. Pawley's contemporary at the AA, Reyner Banham, was particularly negative about his experiences there, claiming that he had been in a state of 'terminal unease' during his many years as a visiting juror, and the experience had made him realise he 'couldn't be an architect and a normal human being' at the same time. He therefore gave up juries 'with a clear conscience'.[19]

With its emphasis on presentation skills, the jury system may favour students with more confident verbal and graphic abilities. American architect, writer and educator Charles Moore, recalling his own architectural education, concluded that closed juries were more successful than open ones, as there was less scope for 'glib talkers':

> I recall lots of waiting around outside while the jurors debated and wrote things on the project. At the time I thought it was too bad to be excluded from the deliberations… But what seemed good about it is that it made the drawings have to speak for themselves, and there was no dependence on glib talking to get through it. …in the schools I've taught in for the past several decades, as closed juries are less and less in evidence, the amount of emphasis on the glib presentation has escalated. And that is a shame.[20]

Personal experience at the University of Canberra indicated that the emphasis placed on major presentations can result in a significant loss of learning potential. Because students must succeed in a presentation to achieve a favourable grade, they feel pressured into being positive to 'sell' their design to the jury, and are reluctant to talk openly about their design process and the difficulties they encountered. Students also feel uncomfortable about commenting on their peers' work, in case their opinions might influence the assessment process.

The politics of power in the design studio were explored by Thomas Dutton in *The Hidden Curriculum and the Design Studio: Towards a Critical Pedagogy*.[21] Dutton maintained that traditional pedagogies used in the studio are marked by serious flaws involving attitudes and patterns of behaviour that are not always apparent. He saw the studio as a microcosm of existing social, economic and political patterns, and argued that knowledge, the commodity that is offered in the studio, is, as any other commodity, not neutral. Instead, its production and distribution are subject to hierarchies and power structures. Dutton proposed that true dialogue requires, as a 'fundamental precondition', an equality of participants – a situation that does not exist in the power structure of the student-teacher relationship. In this interpretation, hierarchy and dialogue are incompatible.

Yet the jury system does provide an environment where students can develop presentation techniques and gain confidence in discussing their work before others, skills that are important in the practice of architecture. There are many architects and educators who see the benefits of the existing jury system for these reasons. One is American architect Robert Stern. Recalling his own architectural education, Stern concluded that the jury system was a realistic process that related to professional practice:

> They were a principal teaching tool. They prepared those of us who could deal with them to deal with clients, boards, and public groups. I think it was a very exciting and realistic process. The discussions of architecture were very good on the jury. I remember them, not necessary all with fondness, but I remember them.[22]

Research among students indicates that the most successful design studios are those where traditional power relationships are broken down. These are studios where the students become actively involved in the process, and where they have the opportunity to discuss their work with jurors and with each other, all within an environment of mutual respect.[23] The least successful studios are those that disempower the students by leaving them out of the review. This results in their becoming confused and mystified about the evaluation process.[24]

Alternative jury formats that promote greater student involvement have been explored at a number of universities.[25] In 1996 a project named CUDE (Clients and Users in Design Education) was initiated between the Universities of York, Sheffield and Leicester. The project was intended to enhance students' skills of listening, communicating and collaboration, as an alternative to the confrontational approach.

One alternative explored by CUDE was the student-led review, or peer review. These were held alongside, or in parallel to, a 'normal' review, and took place with or without tutors. The purpose of these was to promote teamwork and communication skills, and they were successful in encouraging student participation. However, tutors were frustrated at not being able to contribute,[26] and this method still required a separate forum for assessment.[27]

A variation from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, solved this problem. Students were divided into four groups. Each group discussed the work of the other students, working with criteria established by the tutor, and wrote down comments. The whole class then met to discuss the overall submission.[28]

Other methods of maximising student participation include using 'student scribes' or 'peer comments'. For the former, students write down comments made on each presentation, and give these to the presenter. The latter is a variation where verbal presentations are not given. The class pins up its work, and the students are asked to write down comments. The comments are collated, copied and distributed to each student.[29]

In contrast to student-led reviews, client-led reviews attempt to make design projects more 'real', with actual briefs, sites and clients. These are common practice at a number of universities.[30] A problem with this format is the time required for reviews, and the difficulty of retaining a client from outside the university for long periods of time. In order to overcome this problem, and to increase student involvement and understanding, Sheffield University explored role-playing reviews where students took on the role of, for instance, client, developer or planner. They first meet with 'real-life' versions of these and interviewed them to come to an understanding of their position, and then formed a 'review panel' to discuss student designs.[31]

A response to Moore's concerns regarding 'glib talkers' is the closed jury. This format is similar to the traditional Beaux-Arts jury, where students' work was pinned up and then left to 'speak for itself'. This method sharpens students' visual presentation skills, but decreases their involvement in the jury process and leaves them 'in the dark' about results.

To further enhance specific presentation skills, teachers at Leicester employed a 'model only' review. The presentation was limited to models only, with no drawings permitted, and was successful in encouraging students to explore a wider range of model-making techniques in order to describe their ideas.[32]

Recording other students' responses to the presentation is another method of improving students' visual presentation techniques. This technique also introduces students to objectivity, the notion of how different people may interpret the same thing in different ways. Students select an important space in their design, and prepare sketch perspectives of that space. They then record how they intend occupants of that space to react to it. The sketch is displayed in front of the other students, who are asked to record their reactions to the space. Finally, these reactions are compared with the designer's

original intentions. When this method was used at the Institute of Environmental Quality in San Francisco, the students repeated the exercise three times to improve their design presentation skills and their understanding of how other people were responding.[33]

A technique involving presentation in pairs can further develop students' ability to provide objective criticism. One student displays her or his work, while the other student, taking on the role of reviewer, presents their appraisal of the design. At this point, tutors and other students join in. To complete the review, the roles would change (the student who was presenter would become reviewer, and vice versa).

Anthony argued that it is not essential for all students to present their work before a jury, claiming that the review can be more useful for the students if they do not.[34] The select review involves each student pinning up her or his work. A select number of submissions that illustrate elements of the design problem are then presented for group discussion.[35] Rather than the author presenting, a variation on the above involves those who chose a particular scheme being asked to talk about why she or he had chosen it. This latter variation provides a greater level of student participation and interaction.

It has been found that students are more comfortable with a review system that places greater emphasis on the design process, rather than merely on the finished design. To achieve this the final jury can be brought forward. If it is scheduled for one or two weeks before the end of the teaching period, the projects discussed would be 80-90% complete, which is enough for them to be understood and evaluated. Comments made at the jury would then be incorporated into the final submissions, which would be handed in to the tutor by the due date, without the need for further presentations. Students' final marks could reflect how well the submissions responded to the comments made.[36]

It is more likely that students will listen to tutors' comments if they know that they will benefit from them. And this process would remove some of the stigma surrounding the final jury. But one disadvantage of this system is the 'let-down' factor of not having the class together at the end of the semester. From reading many comments by ex-students regarding their jury experiences, it appears that many saw the jury as a finale to their study. And if it was a dramatic event, that was better still. Charles Moore considered the final jury as being important for this reason:

> …the students seem to want to have some sort of culminating festivity and they get disappointed if the jury process happens without such a culmination. In practice, the culmination is getting the damn thing built, but that isn't part of the school experience usually. In school, it becomes necessary to have some obvious artificial, but important, festivity. I think festivities and bloodbaths get mixed up in people's minds, and I think the jury sometimes becomes a 'festival' or 'bloodbath', a trauma, and that students miss it if they don't have it….[37]

<u>Conclusion</u>
More than a century of gradual change and evolution has resulted in the location of the jury at the centre of architectural education, as an integral part of the life and culture of architecture schools around the world.

In spite of the longevity of the model, public presentation of students' work still seems appropriate. Similar presentations are part of everyday life in the practices of architecture, design and art. But a number of problems have been identified with the existing jury system, which, apart from the gradual transition from closed to open format, has changed little since it was introduced to architectural education in nineteenth century Paris.

It would be naïve to deny the existence of, or the importance of, the politics of power in the design studio. It is important to acknowledge existing hierarchies, and to find ways of breaking down, or lessening their impact on the teaching environment. The most successful variations to the traditional jury format, from the students' point of view, are those where they are more involved in the process. Previous changes to the jury system, as mentioned above, have already allowed students greater involvement.

Most of the alternative review procedures that allow greater student participation provide greater learning potential for the student, which is obviously important. But they do not address assessment,

which usually requires a separate or parallel exercise administered by tutors. There does not seem to be an easy answer to this. Peer assessment is limited in scope and has been tried with mixed success. The only other variation that separates the final jury from the assessment process is where the final jury is brought forward, and that method results in an emotional let-down for the students at the end of their study.

It appears that a reformist approach is called for, rather than wholesale change. An approach that recognises the relevance of a variety of review methods for different teaching contexts, rather than the adoption of one model to cover every situation. In an age of design that favours pluralism and ambiguity over absolute truths and singular interpretations, it seems appropriate that the same sentiment should apply to the teaching of design.

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[1] 'crit' is a shortening of 'critical review', 'criticism' or 'critique'.
[2] Notable exceptions to this are Anthony, Kathryn H., *Design Juries on Trial, the Renaissance of the Design Studio*, Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York, 1991, Doidge, Charles, Sara, Rachel, Parnell, Rosie, (Eds.), *The Crit, an Architecture Student's Handbook*, Architectural Press, Oxford, 2000, Dutton, Thomas, *Voices in Architectural Education, Cultural Politics and Pedagogy*, Bergin & Garvey, New York, 1991, and Schon, Donald, *The Design Studio, an Exploration of its Traditions and Potential*, RIBA, London, 1985
[3] Anthony, p. 4
[4] Anthony, 1991
[5] Doidge, p. 7
[6] Anthony, p. 9
[7] Draper, Joan, 'The Ecole des Beaux-Arts and the Architectural Profession in the United States: The Case of John Galen Howard', in Kostov, Spiro, (Ed.), *The Architect*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1977, p. 211
[8] Draper, p. 223
[9] Anthony, p. 11
[10] Anthony, p. 11
[11] For instance, Gropius became chair of the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1937, Mies van der Rohe went to the Illinois Institute of Technology, and Moholy Nagy became Director of the School of Design, Chicago (later to merge with IIT).
[12] Draper, p. 243
[13] Anthony. p. 9
[14] Anthony, p. 11
[15] Anthony, pp. 34-5
[16] Anthony, p. 35
[17] Doidge, p. vii
[18] Pawley, Martin, 'My Lovely Student Life', as cited by Anthony, p. 1
[19] Banham, Reyner, 'Memoirs of a Reluctant Juryman', in Gowan, James (Ed.), *A Continuing Experiment: Learning and Teaching at the Architectural Association, London*, Architectural Press, London, 1975, pp. 174-5.
[20] Moore, Charles W., as cited by Anthony, p. 8
[21] Dutton, Thomas A., 'The Hidden Curriculum and the Design Studio: Towards a Critical Pedagogy', in Dutton, 1991, pp. 165-6
[22] Anthony, p. 8
[23] Anthony, pp. 32-3
[24] Anthony, pp. 33-4
[25] Doidge, p. 89-90
[26] Doidge, p. 92-94
[27] In my teaching experience I have used peer assessment and marking for smaller submissions, with mixed results. Some students felt that other students were not qualified to assess their work.
[28] Anthony, p. 129
[29] Anthony, p. 33
[30] Doidge, p. 96. This method is also employed at the University of Canberra.
[31] Doidge, p. 94
[32] Doidge, p. 101

[33] Anthony, p. 128
[34] Anthony, p. 133
[35] Doidge, pp. 98, 100
[36] Anthony, p. 124
[37] Moore, Charles W., as cited by Anthony, p. 20

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