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This study assesses impediments to lines of communication recurrently found to be operational in design juries, i.e. student to juror, juror to student, juror to juror. Unfortunately, discourse within design juries can be easily blocked or distorted, and can become one-sided and one-way in nature. The following is a brief description of elements in this dialogue that can and often do go awry.

**Keywords:** design education, group behavior, creativity, learning, studio instruction, group leadership.

**Introduction**

Most design educators have experienced a number of very different jury environments, often highly charged emotional experiences for both student and juror. They often provide a forum for the expression of design projects. The jury gathers data and then offers evaluative feedback to the student. Juries can also provide lessons for the student in the realities of "due dates," in scheduling work efforts, and in the need for the development of clear concise verbal and graphic presentation skills. They represent an attempt to simulate the real world demands placed upon the practicing professional architect, landscape architect, urban designer, or interior designer.

Unfortunately juries do not always go as planned; things can go wrong and the environment can quickly become unproductive and even hostile and destructive. Research in group behavior, as well as our own protocol data on juries, indicates that design juries rarely operate at, or even near, their full potential for the efficient and enlightened education of students. These findings also concur with H.J. Anthony's pioneering research concerning the perceived effectiveness of design juries by both jurors and students. Our own survey data, while in general agreement with Anthony's findings, also indicates a prevalent belief among architectural educators that the fundamental concept of 'the jury' as an effective vehicle for design education is valid although flawed. Our research has therefore proceeded under the assumption that design juries, despite certain known imperfections, will continue to be integral components of a wide majority of design school curriculums in the foreseeable future, and hence merit our attention.

Our current research on design juries is arranged into three basic areas of study: the first asks about the sort of elements in a jury's lines of communication can go amiss, what are the ramifications of these problems, and why they occur.

A second area of interest evaluates possible remedies to intra-jury communication obstruction, and also explores methods of facilitating communication among jurors and students.

The third topic of interest to our research discusses possible fundamental revision to existing methods of design education and provides suggestions for further research and development in related areas of study. This article addresses the first of the three areas.

Our basic approach to this type of research involves several different methods of data collection and analysis. Included among these is an essentially ethnographic analysis of video-tape films of juries in several different schools of design (including both architecture and landscape architecture programs), which were also filmed in a variety of different jury situations (schematic, design development, final, first year, fifth year, etc.).

Pre and post jury interviews of many of those same jurors and students filmed are also currently being administered. We are currently surveying design faculty in a number of U.S. schools of design with questionnaires concerning their experiences with methods of view on the, the efficacy of design juries as an educational tool.

**Student to Juror Communication**

The studio environment provides the student with the opportunity to experiment with new design philosophies and procedural approaches to design. The jury should offer a forum in which to express these sometimes rather unfamiliar verbal descriptions of design procedures and form generators. The jury can in many ways simulate the professional world by preparing the student to both explain and defend the relevant design ideas to an interested audience, and to also accept and adapt meaningful comments into a stronger overall project. Unfortunately "student to jury" lines of communication are easily blocked or distorted, and can become one-sided/one-way in nature. Below is a brief description of elements in this dialogue that can and often do go wrong.

**Defensiveness and Hostility**

It is an arduous task set before the student to verbalize clearly and concisely one to eight weeks of three-dimensional thought into a ten to twenty minute presentation, and yet more difficult to then defend this same project to an audience of practiced and highly skilled professionals. This experience can be especially demanding when the jury environment is perceived by the student to be hostile and critical in nature. Many students operate under the assumption that, "I have ten minutes to talk while the jury looks for something to criticize, and then the jury has twenty minutes in which to score points; during which time it is usually safer for me to acquiesce and remain silent."
The student often enters this situation tired and certainly a bit nervous after days of intense work in the development of the design and its graphic presentation. Typically the student has been concentrating on the two and three dimensional aspects of the design and giving little thought to the verbal presentation and subsequent defense of the project. Frequently the student has not visualized how the design might come across to the jury. Scheduling, whether the design is in a visual or textual presentation, might be complicated by the jury's point of view. The jury has powerful leverage over the student that is manifest in the form of grades and more importantly, in the approval or disapproval of the student's design efforts. What counts, more often than not, are the student's preconceived notions of the jury's points of view. The jury has powerful leverage over the student that is manifest in the form of grades and more importantly, in the approval or disapproval of the student's design efforts. And, what is more, these judgments are most often passed in front of a group of the student's peers, who are also perceived as potential judges of the student's 'worth,' and therefore another indirect challenge to self-image.6

Once again, situations such as this can increase defensiveness and hostility, and reduce the student's general receptivity to learning. The student might overreact to comments perceived as criticism, or may feign indifference toward the jury's opinions and therefore antagonize the jury as well. The circular dynamics of this process can be devastating to an environment ostensibly conducive to creative thought and the sharing of information.

Listening

The preceding situation naturally leads to a discussion of students' listening skills in jury environments. An anxious and fatigued student, with defenses up, is not in an optimum frame of mind to listen sensitively to the comments of others. Often the defenses are raised days before the juries actually occur. One prior unsatisfactory experience or the observation of one especially critical jury prejudges the attitude of the student prior to the actual jury itself. Architectural education does not typically concern itself directly with the development of student listening skills. These skills are assumed to just 'be there' when the appropriate time arises. They are not perceived as professionally relevant skills that can be learned or enhanced. The curricular emphasis is typically to the extreme, with only token amounts of teamwork required in design.8 There is also little use of clients in the design process, whereby students might hone their listening skills. These attitudes toward teamwork and listening certainly do not approximate the real professional world's demands of the Architect. It is difficult to imagine any building, from residential to very complex scales, that was not in some way the product of team thinking.5

Observer/Actor Perceptions

Another issue that merits consideration here is the phenomenon of student 'excuses,' as they are...
most often perceived by the faculty or jury. Jones and Nisbett have undertaken interesting research into the wide gap which commonly occurs between the opinions of 'actors' (students) and 'observers' (teachers). The student will often speak of environmental obstacles as reasons for a poor performance, i.e. "I had other homework", "I was too tired to concentrate", etc. The teacher, on the other hand, even though apparently outwardly sympathetic, will most often attribute the student's poor performance to either lack of ability, laziness or perhaps to neurotic ineptitude. Faculty tend to believe that students look for excuses or seek to blame others for personal problems.

The research findings of Jones and Nisbett demonstrate that other powerful cognitive factors may be operative in this situation as well. Although a detailed explanation of their findings is beyond the scope of this paper, they did conclude that, "Actors tend to attribute the causes of their behavior to stimuli inherent in the situation, while observers tend to attribute behavior to stable dispositions of the actor. This is due in part to the actor's more detailed knowledge of his circumstances, history, motives, and experiences. Perhaps more importantly, the tendency is a result of differential salience of the information available to both the actor and observer... The observer often errs by over attributing dispositions, including the broadest kind of dispositions - personality traits. The evidence for personality traits as commonly conceived is sparse. The widespread belief in their existence appears to be due to the observer's failure to realize that the samples of behaviors that s/he sees are not random, as well as to the observer's tendency to see behavior as a manifestation of the actor rather than a response to situational cues. Here again, the information exists between the two parties but is perceived in fundamentally different ways. Would better listening skills for both parties, not help alleviate this problem?

Juror Self-discipline

Students often struggle with the verbalization of new concepts, ideas likely to be quite familiar to their audience of jurors. At this very moment when the jury can become bored and easily diverted from the task at hand, the student most needs their indulgence and attentiveness. The student may be a bit fearful of expressing points of view, especially when these views might run contrary to some juror's known philosophical learnings, but hidden within these sometimes hesitant presentations can be numerous messages and cues about the real meaning of the design and real concerns of the student. The juror must therefore listen with skill and sensitivity. Unfortunately jurors often become inattentive, and bow to the pressure of 'finding something to say', or to their habitual search for 'errors.' I have known a number of jurors who openly admit to the use of review procedures that essentially ignore the student's opening statements. As the student is speaking, the juror's eyes are roving the drawings and models faultfinding. Carl Rogers has written at length about these problems, and suggests that fault-finding is an almost instinctive approach to communication. We often judge and evaluate long before we have given a fair hearing to what the problem and its accompanying issues really are all about. Many jurors will almost immediately raise a fifty percent audio screen to the student's explanation while looking for something to evaluate negatively (inconsistencies, contradictions, errors), rather than trying to understand and build upon the original intentions of the student and the design. As mentioned before, students sense this and quite naturally become defensive and hostile at this show of disrespect. One final point concerning juror to student communication that will be discussed in more detail later, occurs when jurors debate or harangue one another through the student currently presenting. Many times the comments are only peripherally relevant to the student's design, and therefore become a potentially confusing tangle of criticism. If the student's design teacher is not present or the jury does not 'protect' the student in these situations the whole point of the jury as an educational agent disappears, with the student further alienated from the process.

Juror to Juror Communication

As previously suggested, jurors frequently attend juries armed with hidden agendas. The jury can be seen by some jurors as a potential forum in which to propound a certain philosophical approach to design, or to respond to previous statements made by other jurors at other times. Other relatively common misuses of the jury format occur when attempts to discourage divergent opinions within the jury itself are made. Flattery and showing-off to attending high administration figures or prominent visiting jurors is another artifice that often will set aside educational goals, and divert the jury from one of its primary purposes - to serve and educate the student.

Defensiveness/Hostility

Old and unresolved hostilities among jurors can distort the meaning of certain comments, and arguments can occur without a harsh word ever being spoken. Unfortunately the student is often listed among the casualties of
these "quiet little wars". The offending juror will be seen as speaking to the other jurors through the student, or as unduly criticizing another critic's students because their work reflects the unappreciated elements of said critic's design attitudes. I have witnessed on numerous occasions a student being harshly criticized due to a "turn about is fair play" attitude which is reflected in the following statement: "In yesterday's juries you were unfair to my students, so today one another's remonstrated agendas serve to block communication; the juror with a pre-planned response listens neither to the student nor to subsequent juror remarks. The result is obvious in the amount of energy diverted from the tasks at hand: to educate, learn, share, debate, listen, and respect. It is a selfish indulgence on the juror's part and a wasteful misuse of the jury's energy and expertise.

What do jurors want or need from the jury experience?

- nourishment from the event in the form of recognition, and respect from both students and peers, (a good grade).
- a fair hearing for their ideas and attitudes
- an opportunity to educate.
- an opportunity to learn and expand their own thinking on design and education - to grow and to change.

These goals are, in most ways, compatible with those of the students.

Rivalry

Perhaps intrajury rivalries coupled with the need for personal recognition cause some of the most severe problems in the juror to juror line of communication. By not listening sensitively to fellow jurors while "out" searching for design weaknesses, and by responding to the subtle competitive urge often felt among jurors to be the first to uncover and draw attention to "profound design deficiencies", the offending juror drains the discipline and cooperative energies of the jury. By not cooperating and building upon one another's remarks and ideas, the cumulative effect of the jury can be distracted, and threatened student. The concept suggested here is not only a fair hearing for all juror ideas, but to also build on each idea momentarily to see its potential for development more clearly. The student will eventually be presented with a series of delineated ideas which may or may not be chosen for further exploration. This is therefore not a call for jury consensus, in fact it is a warning against striving for consensus. Perfect accord is not needed by the juror nor by the student, and is probably non-productive in the long run. Allow diversity of opinion to exist, learn from these differences. This in itself is an effective demonstration of respect for one's peers and students.13

The need to convert others to our way of thinking seems almost instinctual at times, and it can be very difficult to evaluate projects. This in itself is an effective demonstration of respect for one's peers and students.13

Leadership

The preceding naturally leads into a discussion of the need for effective leadership in juries. Twenty years of research in group dynamics has led the Synectics group in Cambridge to stress the role of leadership in enhancing the productivity of task oriented groups.1 To date, our research indicates that similar leadership dilemmas can and often do arise in juries as well. The following is a brief discussion of the various elements of juries that can go awry without effective leadership.

Injury situations the role of leader is often undesignated or assigned by default, and this lack of definition can lead to confusion and competition for the leadership role. Synectics has found that a great deal of energy can be expended in these activities, thereby diverting the group from its intended goals. Synectics has observed that in any meeting without a firmly designated leader two or three individuals tend to vie for the leadership role, with the most forceful usually winning temporary leadership, subject to continuous challenges. This type of behavior obviously discourages sensitive listening, increase interruptions, and generally encourages a disrespectful and selfish atmosphere unless it can be moderated by some intervening constructive force.

The ability to facilitate a jury's movement toward productive goals is a learned skill requiring initial insight into the need for effective listening skills, practice, patience, and then again more practice. Unskilled leaders...
can sometimes unwittingly misrepresent their position to promote their own ideas and agendas with the jury and students, thereby denying the jury an equal hearing for the presentation of their ideas. Often, this will occur accompanied by politely masked manipulations of the participants, and strategy to the inferences of these attempts are readily transparent to most parties involved. These manipulations will in turn lead to a reduction in the jury's credibility. These insinuations are most often perceived by the juror as an attempt to win converts and as a challenge to their own ideas and beliefs.16

By default, many jurors allow various eclectic versions of “Robert’s Rules” to become the leader of the proceedings. As the Synectics Group has pointed out, these rules of group behavior are designed to keep order and to govern all conflict views to be stated and defended; they are not designed to encourage creative group ideation, and an atmosphere conducive to open and free speculation. Synectics research has again demonstrated that time after time “Robert’s Rules” can restrict the outcome of group achievement toward mediocrity and that can allow for a leadership which is careless with the ideas and feelings of the other participants. This in turn, can set up a milieu of contagious disrespect where each juror begins to see the proceedings as a contest where if someone wins - someone else loses.17

This carelessness with the ideas of others can occur in another way when unformed/undeveloped ideas are immediately dismissed by the juror and the leadership as ‘impossible’ or ‘crazy’. The jury often expects complete and tightly developed ideas which are pre-sented in one clean statement, (this is especially unrealistic in preliminary reviews). The problem is that many good ideas initially arrive in undeveloped form, and therefore do not receive the attention they deserve. More superficial or conventional ideas and concepts then become the jury’s focus; ones that are quickly completed, easy to comprehend, and easy to defend.

**Group Think**

Juries can develop certain unified group behaviors and attitudes over a period of time working with one another. Potentially this familiarity can be quite helpful in shortening the general tendencies of getting to know you type behavior. A familiarity with one another’s strengths and attitudes can be quite useful in a jury situation where each juror respects the area’s areas of expertise and interest, and can then begin to build upon each other’s ideas, and thereby more effectively educate the students.18

This ‘group attitude’ can also cause several problems for the jury and for the students as well, particularly when jurors have worked together over a long period of time. The juror can begin to develop an illusion of unanimity. Through subtle self-censorship they begin to assume that all jurors truly agree with the procedures used, ideas discussed, design approaches taught, curriculum decisions implemented, etc. As described in Irving Janis’ Group Think, this self-censorship can be quite powerful, with direct pressure being brought to bear upon any examples of ‘deviant’ thought.19 Over time, this type of behavior can contribute to the formation of the group illusion of invulnerability and morality. The resulting behavior is one of formulaic thinking and rationalization, a situation quite detrimental to the cultivation of individual or group creative thought and behavior.

These problems occur much less frequently in environments where self-expression is encouraged, where mutual respect among all members allows all ideas a fair hearing, and where sensitive listening and effective leadership are the norm.

Although the preceding analysis of a jury’s lines of communication may appear pessimistic in nature, and filled with worst-case scenarios, the resolution of these examples of deleterious behavior involves just a few very basic concepts, with which we are all familiar: respect for others, the ability to listen to and understand the attitudes and feelings of others, and sensitive and effective leadership skills.

As educators, we are often quite hesitant to acknowledge that we are remiss in the application of any of these attributes concerning our students and colleagues. Unfortunately, research from most of the above sources, including our own, indicates that we most often neglect these principles of common decency when operating in group environments. The power of these skills to produce creative thought and behavior, and to diminish counterproductive habits is profound. There is a tendency to underestimate this material, in that listening and respect are assumed to be “just common sense”. It is difficult to perceive oneself as disrespectful, or as someone who is consistently careless with the feelings and ideas of others. Unfortunately, both our own research findings and personal teaching experiences over the past fifteen years support the contention that irresponsible behavior can and often is habitual and virtually unconscious, and therefore requires time, patience, and devotion to rectify.

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**NOTES**


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